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# Genocide till the very end

## Zionists kill scores before Gaza ceasefire begins at 8:30 am on Sunday

**GAZA:** A ceasefire in the Gaza war will begin on Sunday morning, mediator Qatar said after the Zionist entity's cabinet voted to approve the truce and captive-prisoner release deal. Since Qatar and the United States, which mediated the deal along with Egypt, announced the agreement on Wednesday, Zionist strikes on Gaza have continued.

At least 123 Palestinians have been killed in Zionist strikes since the ceasefire deal was announced on Wednesday, the Palestinian Civil Emergency Service said. Nearly 47,000 have been killed since the start of the war, according to the Palestinian health ministry. On Saturday, Gaza's civil defense rescue agency said at least five members of a family were killed when a strike hit their tent in Khan Yunis, in southern Gaza. Zionist tanks shelled the Zeitoun neighborhood of Gaza City and airstrikes hit central and southern Gaza, residents said.

Explosions were heard over Jerusalem after air raid sirens blared and the military said a projectile had been launched from Yemen, whose Houthi rebels say they support the Palestinians. The Houthis said they targeted the Zionist defense ministry, before air raid sirens sounded again in the Zionist entity's south in the afternoon and the military said it intercepted a missile launched from Yemen.

"As coordinated by the parties to the agreement and the mediators, the ceasefire in the Gaza Strip will begin at 8:30 am (0630

GMT) on Sunday," Qatar's foreign ministry spokesman Majed al-Ansari said. In more than 15 months of war between Hamas and the Zionist entity, there has been only one previous truce, for one week, in Nov 2023. That deal also saw the release of Zionist captives in exchange for Palestinian prisoners.

"The government has approved the hostage return plan," the office of Zionist Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said after the cabinet vote. Netanyahu's office said the deal "supports achieving the objectives of the war". But Hamas said the Zionist entity had "failed to achieve its aggressive goals" and "only succeeded in committing war crimes that disgrace the dignity of humanity".

Mediator Egypt said Saturday that the Zionist entity is to release more than 1,890 Palestinian prisoners in exchange for 33 Zionist captives in the first phase of a Gaza truce. The foreign ministry said the prisoners would be freed during the first, 42-day phase of the ceasefire. The Zionist justice ministry had earlier said 737 Palestinian prisoners and detainees would be freed - none before 4:00 pm (1400 GMT) on Sunday.

Qatari Prime Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim Al-Thani has said an initial 42-day ceasefire would see 33 captives released in Gaza. Sheikh Mohammed told Sky News the framework signed this week was the same as one agreed on December 23, adding it amount-

ed to "13 months of a waste of negotiating details". The truce is to take effect on the eve of Donald Trump's inauguration for a second term as US president.

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas said the Palestinian Authority, which has partial administrative control in the Zionist-occupied West Bank, has completed preparations "to assume full responsibility in Gaza" after the war. The Zionist entity has expressed no definitive stance on post-war governance beyond rejecting any role for either Hamas or the PA. Outgoing US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said Gaza should be under PA control.

Ahead of the truce, displaced Gazans prepared to return home. "I will go to kiss my land," said Nasr Al-Gharabli, who fled his home in Gaza City for a camp further south. "If I die on my land, it would be better than being here as a displaced person." The Zionist military campaign has destroyed much of Gaza, killing 46,899 people, most of them civilians.

The Zionist cabinet endorsement of the deal came despite eight ministers voting against it, including far-right ministers Itamar Ben Gvir and Bezalel Smotrich. Mediators had worked for months to reach a deal but the efforts were fruitless until Trump's inauguration neared. Brett McGurk, the pointman for outgoing President Joe Biden, was joined in the region by Trump envoy Steve Witkoff in an un-



**GAZA:** A relative mourns over the body of a child, one of four members of the Palestinian Al-Qadra family (parents and their two children), killed in a Zionist strike that hit their tent north of Khan Yunis in the southern Gaza Strip, at the morgue of the Nasser Hospital on Jan 18, 2025. — AFP

usual pairing to finalize the agreement, US officials said.

Zionist authorities assume the 33 captives to be released in the first phase are alive, but Hamas has yet to confirm that. Also in the first phase, Zionist forces would withdraw from Gaza's densely populated areas and allow displaced Palestinians

to return "to their residences", the Qatari prime minister said. A Zionist military official said reception points had been established at Kerem Shalom, Erez and Reim, where hostages would be joined by doctors and mental health specialists before being "transported via helicopter or vehicle" to hospitals in the Zionist entity. — Agencies

# Beyond Horizons

## Local

# First Deputy PM confirms depth of military cooperation with US

## Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef meets senior officials at Camp Buehring



KUWAIT: Kuwait's First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense and Interior Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef Saud Al-Sabah visits Camp Buehring (formerly Camp Udairi) in northwest Kuwait. — KUNA photos

KUWAIT: Kuwait's First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense and Interior Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef Saud Al-Sabah, reaffirmed on Saturday the enduring military cooperation between Kuwait and the United States.

This reaffirmation followed Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef's visit to Camp Buehring (formerly Camp Udairi) in northwest Kuwait, where he met with General Patrick Frank, Commander of US Central Command Ground Forces, and US Ambassador to Kuwait, Karen Hideko Sasahara.

In a statement issued by the Ministry of Defense, First Deputy Prime Minister emphasized both countries' commitment to further enhancing their partnership, particularly in military training and defense coordination. Such cooperation plays a crucial role in advancing shared interests and bolstering security and stability in the region.

During the visit, Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef was briefed on the operational plans and responsibilities of the forces stationed at the camp. He received comprehensive updates from military leaders regarding their readiness and ongoing joint coordination efforts.

The First Deputy Prime Minister was accompanied by Deputy Chief of Staff of the Kuwaiti Army, Staff Air Vice Marshal Sabah Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, and several senior officers.

In mid-December, Kuwait and the US also praised their military ties in a joint statement following the sixth round of the Kuwait-US Strategic Dialogue, held virtually from Dec 9-11. Both sides expressed appreciation for their robust defense partnership, including Kuwait's hosting of US forces. They also commended the 15th meeting of the US-Kuwait Joint Military Committee, held in Kuwait from May 20-21, 2024, and agreed to continue regular meetings to strengthen defense cooperation.

The dialogue reaffirmed ongoing efforts to enhance cybersecurity, combat terrorism, and promote human rights. The efforts include the 10th edition of the Best Cyber Warrior Competition launched by the Ministry of Defense in October, in collaboration with US Central Command (USARCENT). This competition underscores the growing importance of cyber defense and reflects both nations' commitment to strengthening their partnership in this critical area. — Agencies



## Kuwait redistributes wheelchairs to citizens with disabilities

KUWAIT: Kuwait is resuming wheelchair distribution for people with disabilities, following a suspension that lasted several years. This initiative aims to address the basic needs of individuals with disabilities and improve their quality of life.

In a press statement published by Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) on Thursday, Dr Amthal Al-Huwailah, Minister of Social Affairs, Family, and Childhood Affairs, explained that this action is part of a broader plan to support the rights of people with disabilities and ensure they have access to services that enhance their well-being. She highlighted efforts to overcome previous obstacles in providing essential equipment and tools, though specific details regarding these barriers were not disclosed. Dr. Al-Huwailah emphasized the importance of cooperation with relevant authorities to ensure the continuity of these services. She also outlined plans to improve infrastructure and further develop services for people with disabilities, including providing medical equipment, training programs, and psychological and social support. Additionally, she reiterated her commitment to advancing policies and services aimed at integrating people with disabilities into society and promoting their rights.

### Eligibility criteria

To be eligible for a wheelchair, applicants must meet certain criteria. The beneficiary must be a Kuwaiti citizen or treated as a Kuwaiti individual under a decision issued by the Ministry of Interior of Kuwait. They must also hold a disability certificate from the Public Authority for Disability Affairs that confirms the presence of a moderate or severe mobility disability, or any equivalent disabilities that require the use of a wheelchair, as confirmed by a report from the committee.

A wheelchair will be provided once every three years for those under the age of 16 and every two years for those above the age of 16. The wheelchair distribution must not conflict with any other government entity that provides similar support. Electric wheelchairs are not provided for individuals with intellectual disabilities or for children under 15 unless deemed appropriate by the specialized technical committee.

Applicants are required to submit a copy of the applicant's civil ID, an official authorization from the disabled individual or their guardian if applying through a representative, and a recent medical report that diagnoses the condition, stating the cause of the disability and the individual's health status.

## Social affairs minister slams auditors at cooperative societies

KUWAIT: Dr Amthal Al-Huwailah, Minister of Social Affairs and Family and Childhood Affairs, emphasized the need to strengthen oversight mechanisms within cooperative societies on Thursday. During a meeting with senior officials from the Cooperative Societies Control and Inspection Department, she strongly criticized the performance of financial and administrative auditors in cooperative societies, accusing them of failing to fulfill their duties. According to media reports, Al-Huwailah pointed out instances of misreporting and the overlooking of violations, stressing the need for increased accountability and professionalism.

The minister called for the enhancement of oversight practices and the efficiency of auditors to ensure quality operations within cooperatives. She reaffirmed that the law must be applied equally to all, including government officials, businesses, and employees. Al-Huwailah also mentioned potential reforms in the cooperative sector, including changes to the laws governing these societies. She raised concerns about privatization efforts, warning that this could result in control by traders.

Dr Al-Huwailah conducted an inspection tour of the department, reviewing work processes and addressing employees, reported Kuwait News Agency (KUNA). She emphasized the importance of ad-



Dr Amthal Al-Huwailah

## Emergency Medical Services handled over 173,000 cases in 2024

KUWAIT: Dr Ahmad Al-Shatti, Director of the Emergency Medical Department at the Ministry of Health, reported that the department handled a total of 173,839 cases in 2024, with 137,914 emergency calls received. He highlighted that 144,478 cases were transported by ambulance, including 99,546 urgent cases and 44,932 non-urgent cases.

Dr Al-Shatti also provided details on the department's response to road accidents, with 10,911 cases managed, and air ambulance services, which transported 1,062 patients. Additionally, 78 cases were handled through medical evacuations, and 506 cases were managed for patients arriving and departing via the country's borders.

The department also conducted 97 mock drills to maintain preparedness. Dr Al-Shatti praised the exceptional efforts of the medical teams, especially during the 26th Gulf Cup Football Championship (Khaleeji Zain 26), where over a quarter of a million people, including attendees, participating teams, officials, and media personnel, were provided emergency medical services over the course of 13 days. The event saw 463 personnel, 50 ambulances, golf



KUWAIT: This file illustrative photo shows one of Kuwait's cooperative societies.

herring to Cabinet directives to maintain the quality of cooperative work and ensuring the presence of auditors during official working hours. The minister confirmed that regular meetings will continue to monitor performance and improve quality, and reiterated that her office remains open for suggestions and inquiries.

### Anti-corruption efforts

The cooperative sector has faced corruption issues for years. In 2024, Al-Huwailah referred expat workers and former Kuwaiti members of the boards of the Abdullah Al-Mubarak and Jahra Cooperative Societies to public prosecution. This action was part

of efforts to combat corruption, protect public funds, and safeguard shareholders' rights.

In January 2025, the ministry issued a statement confirming its ongoing commitment to address corruption. The statement noted that a team formed on June 25, 2024, headed by Assistant Undersecretary for Legal Affairs Heba Al-Shammari, had received 100 reports concerning suspected corruption in the ministry's sectors, including cooperative societies and public benefit societies under its supervision. The team has investigated these reports in collaboration with the relevant departments, providing recommendations to address the errors that led to these issues.



KUWAIT: Emergency Medical Department personnel pose for a photo at an event held to honor those who provided emergency medical services during Khaleeji Zain 26. — KUNA

carts, and four-wheel-drive vehicles deployed, and 200 emergency medical technicians were trained on handling sports injuries, with 517 cases treated.

Additionally, the "Paramedic in Every Home" program benefited 15,000 individuals, and 3,500 people

participated in CPR training sessions held in October 2024. Dr Al-Shatti acknowledged the dedication and efforts of the staff in providing emergency medical services, contributing to the overall well-being of the community throughout the year. — KUNA

Local

# Kuwait participates in Kochi Dialogue to boost India ties

## Event seeks to deepen cooperation between India and the GCC



GCC Secretary General Jasem Mohamed Al-Budaiwi addresses the gathering.



KOCHI: Indian and Gulf officials, including GCC Secretary General Jasem Mohamed Al-Budaiwi and Kuwaiti Ambassador Meshal Mustafa Al-Shemali, pose for a photo during the Kochi Dialogue 2025.

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait participated in the Kochi Dialogue 2025 to boost relations between India and Kuwait. The event, held in the southern Indian state of Kerala, was also held to cement cooperation between India and the Gulf Cooperation Council. The Kuwait Embassy in India told KUNA that Secretary General of the GCC Jasem Mohamed Al-Budaiwi participated in the Kochi Dialogue held on January 16-17.

The event, considered the first of its kind to deepen cooperation between India and the GCC, was organized by the Centre for Public Policy Research, Kochi, in collaboration with the Indian ministry of external affairs under the theme 'India's Look West Policy in Action: People, Prosperity and Progress'. Kuwaiti Ambassador Meshal Mustafa Al-Shemali said that the dialogue would help both sides to enhance cooperation in several areas of mutual interest including energy, trade and investment, defense, security, healthcare, food and cybersecurity.

The dialogue is also a new platform to create promising multi-faceted future visions that bring together the GCC countries and India. The two-day dialogue was attended by senior officials from India and the Gulf countries, including government officials, ambassadors and businessmen, to discuss bilateral, regional and global issues.

The discussions focused on five pivotal topics related to India's relations with the Gulf, including trade, economy, investments, strategic maritime partnerships, education, healthcare, technology, outreach to the diaspora and cooperation and innovation in the field of energy. Minister of State for External Affairs and Minister of Environment, Forests and Climate Change Kirti Vardhan Singh inaugurated the dialogue, while the Secretary General of the GCC Jasem Mohamed Al-Budaiwi delivered a special speech on the occasion of the launch of the Kochi Dialogue 2025.

Al-Budaiwi emphasized the deep-rooted historical ties and strategic partnerships between the GCC states and India across various sectors, stating that both sides constantly strive to strengthen these partnerships. The GCC Secretary General highlighted the event's significance in fostering cooperation between India and the GCC. He described the dialogue as a real opportunity and valuable platform for exploring mutually beneficial areas of collaboration, facilitating exchange between policymakers, diplomats, researchers, thinkers and public and private sector investors.

Al-Budaiwi stressed the crucial role of the strategic partnership between the GCC and India in key areas such

as trade, energy, technology and education in achieving economic stability, regional prosperity and collaborative efforts to address global economic challenges like climate change and food security. Moreover, he emphasized that joint GCC-India efforts will be fundamental to achieving sustainable economic and social development.

He further detailed the long-standing historical relationship between the Gulf and India, dating back centuries. He noted India's importance as a vital trading partner for the Gulf region since the 18th century, particularly in trade, culture, and education, with Bombay (now Mumbai) serving as a major economic hub for Gulf traders. Al-Budaiwi also acknowledged the strong human and cultural ties, and the contributions of prominent Gulf figures to educational and charitable institutions in India, further strengthening cultural bonds.

Looking ahead, Al-Budaiwi's key areas for future focus include collaboration in technology and innovation within the context of the Fourth Industrial Revolution. He underscored the importance of cooperation in artificial intelligence, fintech, and renewable energy for sustainable development. He also stressed the need to prioritize combating climate change and enhancing food security, advocating for the development of sus-

tainable food supply chains and new technologies for water resource management.

He also addressed the ongoing free trade negotiations between the GCC and India, underscoring the importance of accelerating these talks to remove trade barriers, open new markets, and enhance cooperation in digital economies and industrial transformation. On the economic front, he noted the significant growth in trade relations between the GCC and India in recent years.

"Bilateral trade reached approximately \$174.2 billion in 2022, representing about 11.3 percent of the GCC's total trade. GCC exports to India totaled around \$90.8 billion, reflecting India's importance as a key trading partner," Al-Budaiwi highlighted. He also pointed out that Gulf investments in India have exceeded \$5.72 billion, contributing significantly to economic development and growth in both regions, creating jobs and stimulating economic growth, making India a vital strategic partner for the GCC.

In conclusion, Al-Budaiwi expressed optimism about the future of GCC-India relations, emphasizing that these ties, built on a long history of collaboration, are now focused on addressing global challenges requiring the highest levels of cooperation and harmony among nations.



KUWAIT: EU Ambassador to Kuwait Anne Koistinen and Polish Ambassador to Kuwait Michal Cholewa meet local media representatives. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat



## Polish ambassador eyes strengthened ties with Kuwait, GCC

By Faten Omar

**KUWAIT:** The Embassy of Poland to Kuwait held a press conference on Thursday to discuss Poland's presidency of the Council of the European Union, which will run from January 1 to June 30, 2025. This marks Poland's second time holding the presidency. Polish Ambassador to Kuwait Michal Cholewa highlighted that the main goal of Poland's presidency program is to implement priorities centered around security, with the motto: "Security, Europe!"

"The foundation of the Polish presidency's activities in 2025 is multifaceted security — external, internal, informational, energy, economic, food and health," Cholewa said. He added that the foreign affairs agenda will focus on strengthening the security and resilience of the European Union and its partners through close cooperation with the EU, making regional stability a top priority.

The ambassador emphasized that the presidency will prioritize political, military and economic support for Ukraine while maintaining the current approach toward Russia. Additionally, Poland will promote pro-European reforms in aspiring EU member states as part of the enlargement process.

Cholewa also stressed the importance of enhancing

EU-GCC dialogue and cooperation. "In the Middle East and the Gulf, the Polish presidency will support efforts to ensure safety. We will seek to strengthen the EU's energy security. Poland is part of the EU's maritime defensive security operation in the Red Sea, EUNAVFOR Aspides and the Combined Maritime Forces (CMF) coalition in Bahrain," he said.

"Our goal remains to stop escalation in the Middle East and provide humanitarian assistance to civilians. We see the GCC states as increasingly active actors on the regional and global scene, proving to be solid and reliable partners for the EU in trade, counterterrorism, energy, environment, climate change, non-proliferation and economic diversification," he added.

Regarding Poland-Kuwait relations, Cholewa noted that the Polish presidency coincides with Kuwait's presidency of the GCC, offering an opportunity to strengthen bilateral ties. "In this context, we hope for high-level visits in 2025," he said. He affirmed Poland's support for lifting Schengen visa requirements for Kuwaitis and expressed optimism about progress. Poland is also committed to advancing trade and economic cooperation, as outlined in the EU-GCC summit declaration. Upcoming high-level visits will further address these issues.

Cholewa acknowledged the security challenges in Syria during this transitional period. He mentioned that while EU embassies are currently operating from Beirut, plans to reopen in Damascus are under consideration, with security being a top priority to ensure the safety of diplomatic missions.

EU Ambassador to Kuwait Anne Koistinen also spoke at the press conference, highlighting the importance of the presidency in advancing the EU's

collective foreign policy objectives. "I would like to congratulate Poland on taking over the rotating presidency of the Council of the EU. In light of the success of the first Polish presidency in 2011, we are confident that Poland will succeed in its second presidency," she said.

Koistinen noted the significance of the Polish presidency coinciding with Kuwait's GCC presidency. "During its presidency, Kuwait played a key role in driving forward the outcomes of the first EU-GCC Summit in Brussels last year. Later in 2025, Kuwait will host the 29th Joint Council and Ministerial Meetings between the 27 EU Member States and the six GCC countries. Last but not least, I would like to congratulate Kuwait on becoming the Arab Capital of Culture and Media in 2025," she added.

Concerning Syria's transitional period and refugees, Koistinen explained that the EU's engagement with Syria's transitional leadership remains cautious. "The EU supports a peaceful and inclusive transition that ensures the protection of all minorities. While humanitarian aid continues to meet the needs of Syrians, conditions in the country are not yet suitable for the dignified and voluntary return of refugees. The EU will follow United Nations recommendations to assess the appropriate time for returns," she said.

She also emphasized the role of the EU Delegation in Kuwait in organizing and hosting regular meetings for heads of missions from EU Member States. "These meetings provide a platform for exchanging views and coordinating work in Kuwait. I look forward to working closely with Polish colleagues in the coming six months to achieve the objectives and priorities of the EU's Polish presidency," Koistinen concluded.

## Kuwait committed to strong economic ties with Austria

**VIENNA:** Kuwait's Ambassador to Austria and Permanent Representative to the UN and International Organizations in Vienna Talal Al-Fassam reaffirmed Kuwait's commitment to enhancing economic cooperation with Austria, emphasizing the promising investment opportunities available under the country's 2035 vision.

This statement was given to KUNA following Al-Fassam's meeting with Georg Knill, President of the Austrian Federal Economic Chamber, at its headquarters in Vienna, where they discussed prospects for bilateral cooperation in economic and industrial sectors. Al-Fassam underlined Kuwait's eagerness to collaborate with Austrian companies, particularly those with expertise in sustainable development, energy and infrastructure.

He also highlighted the importance of strengthening partnerships between the two countries' private sectors, emphasizing the necessity of exchanging expertise and transferring industrial technology to support sustainable economic development efforts. Al-Fassam said this cooperation marks a significant step toward bolstering bilateral relations and opening new horizons for joint investments, ultimately serving the developmental goals of both countries. — KUNA



VIENNA: Kuwait's Ambassador to Austria Talal Al-Fassam meets President of the Austrian Federal Economic Chamber Georg Knill. — KUNA

## Kuwaiti seeks to boost ties with Italy's Lombardy

**MILAN:** The Consul General of Kuwait in Milan Sheikh Jaber Duajj Al-Malek Al-Sabah met on Thursday with the President of Lombardy Regional Government Attilio Fontana to discuss ways to enhance trade and cultural exchange and support joint investments. In a statement received by KUNA, the Kuwaiti Consulate in Milan explained that the meeting focused on strengthening bilateral relations between Kuwait and Italy, developing cooperation at all levels, and addressing a range of issues of mutual interest.

During the meeting, the Consul General emphasized the importance of the relationship between Kuwait and the Lombardy region, highlighting the readiness to offer support to elevate the relations to a higher level. He also praised Fontana's efforts in achieving progress and development. Fontana expressed his appreciation for the



MILAN: Consul General of Kuwait in Milan Sheikh Jaber Duajj Al-Malek Al-Sabah meets President of Lombardy Regional Government Attilio Fontana. — KUNA

role of the Kuwaiti consulate in strengthening the bonds of friendship and cooperation between the two countries. He also commended the continuous support provided by Kuwait to the region in various fields.

At the conclusion of the meeting, both parties underscored the importance of continuing dialogue and joint coordination to achieve shared goals and enhance the partnership for the benefit of both peoples. — KUNA

## US imposes sanctions on Yemen Kuwait Bank

**WASHINGTON:** The US on Friday imposed sanctions on a Yemen-based financial institution that Washington accused of financially supporting the Houthis, as President Joe Biden's administration sought to further pressure the group before Biden leaves office. The US Treasury Department in a statement said it imposed sanctions on Yemen Kuwait Bank, accusing it of helping the Houthis exploit the Yemeni banking sector to launder money and transfer funds to allies, including Lebanon's Hezbollah.

The Houthis have carried out more than 100 attacks on ships since November 2023. They have sunk two vessels, seized another and killed at least four seafarers. The intensity of the attacks has disrupted global shipping and prompted route changes. The attacks have disrupted international commerce, forcing some ships to

take the long route around southern Africa rather than the Suez Canal, leading to increases in insurance rates, delivery costs and time that stoked global inflation fears.

The Houthis seized power in Yemen in late 2014 and control most parts of the country including the capital Sanaa. They have also launched missiles and drones towards the Zionist entity, hundreds of kilometres to the north. The Zionist entity has responded by striking Houthi areas on several occasions. Last week Zionist warplanes bombed two ports and a power station.

The US alongside Britain launched a multinational operation in December 2023 to safeguard commerce in the Red Sea, and has repeatedly conducted air strikes on Houthi strongholds targeting weapons storage facilities. Biden's action, ahead of the inauguration on Monday of President-elect Donald Trump, freezes any of Yemen Kuwait Bank's US assets and generally bars Americans from dealing with it. Those that engage in certain transactions with it also risk being hit with US sanctions. — Reuters

## Local

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In my view

## Love and peace



By Dr Nermin Al-Houti

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This is Egypt—the land of love and peace. Last week, during my visit to the land of Kenanah, I received a gracious invitation from Pope Tawadros II, the 118th Pope of Alexandria and the Patriarch of the See of St Mark, to join our Coptic brothers in celebrating their glorious holidays, which took place on Jan 6. As always, I was eager to participate in this joyful occasion, a custom I hold dear, one that I strive to maintain with our Egyptian Coptic community in Kuwait. However, this year, the experience of celebrating in Egypt—the land of love and peace—felt different.

Our journey began with a visit to the cathedral in the New Administrative Capital. The road leading to it is worthy of an article in itself, filled with countless examples of development: new projects, roads, bridges, Olympic clubs, and more. The scene painted a vibrant picture of the prosperous future of the land of the Mahrousa (Egypt). Upon arriving at the cathedral, I was struck by the building's harmonious blend of historical significance and modern vitality. The reception was impeccable, both in terms of security and the warmth of the social atmosphere. From the moment we arrived, it was clear that we were standing on soil enriched by the legacies of many great civilizations—a fertile land that has long served as “the cradle of religions.” The land of Kenanah, the cradle of prophets and their families, continues to embrace them with love and peace.

The celebrations themselves were a testament to unity and togetherness, beautifully portrayed through an artistic display that brought together people from all religions, countries, and backgrounds to share in the holiday joy with our Coptic brothers. The atmosphere was made even more special by the presence of His Excellency President Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi, President of the Arab Republic of Egypt, who, to our surprise, entered the cathedral accompanied by Pope Tawadros.

No matter how many lines I write, words can hardly capture the sincerity and warmth I experienced in those moments—the heartfelt love and joy from the Egyptian people, as well as President Sisi's deep commitment to sharing in their celebration. As the president stated in his speech, “I love you, and I am keen to be with you.”

In conclusion, this is Egypt—the land of love and peace. My heartfelt wishes go out to our Christian brothers and sisters.



MANAMA: Kuwaiti Ambassador to Bahrain, Sheikh Thamer Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, watches a demonstration from Kuwaiti students who organized the first aid awareness campaign. — KUNA

## Kuwaiti students in Bahrain launch first aid campaign

MANAMA: The Independent Kuwaiti Students' Gathering at the Arabian Gulf University in Bahrain recently organized a voluntary campaign aimed at raising awareness about the importance of first aid in saving lives and responding quickly to emergencies. The campaign took place over two days at The Avenues Bahrain, with the goal of educating the public on essential first aid techniques and their potential to make a life-saving difference in critical situations.

Kuwaiti Ambassador to Bahrain, Sheikh Thamer Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, participated in the campaign and expressed his admiration for the students' initiative. He highlighted that such voluntary efforts reflect the bright image of Kuwaiti society and showcase the youth's determination to give back selflessly. In a statement to the Kuwait News Agency (KUNA), Ambassador Al-Sabah emphasized that the students' actions demonstrate a high sense of responsibility and a deep humanitarian spirit. He added that these initiatives embody the true essence of Kuwaiti society, with the youth actively contributing to the country's future progress.

In recognition of their efforts, Ambassador Al-Sabah presented a shield of appreciation to the Independent Kuwaiti Students' Gathering. He assured them that the embassy is committed to supporting their initiatives and meeting their needs. The ambassador also expressed his gratitude to the National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) Bahrain branch for its support in organizing the event.—KUNA

## Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: A man rides his bicycle past palm trees along the Gulf waters in Kuwait City on Jan 16, 2025. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

300 northern lapwings detected in Kuwait's Sulaibiya farms in Jan  
KEPS holds 'Winter Bird Count' event in Sulaibikhat to raise awareness

By Faten Omar

KUWAIT: Kuwait Environment Protection Society (KEPS) hosted a “Winter Bird Count” event in Sulaibikhat on Saturday, which saw bird watchers, environmentalists, photography enthusiasts, diplomats and representatives of state departments and volunteers participating. The event helps document migratory and endemic birds in Kuwait during the winter and allows birdwatchers to look for new species that might make stops in Kuwait. This year, hundreds of northern lapwings – a previously unseen bird in Kuwait – were detected by birdwatchers participating in the event.

“The event aims to raise awareness of the importance of birds in the Kuwaiti environment,” said Mohammed Shah, head of the bird monitoring and protection team at KEPS. He explained that the season of the bird count varies from one country to another, noting that the months of December and January are considered the best times for winter bird count in Kuwait. The annual gathering started in 2012 as a one-day event, but it was extended this year “to document all the birds that can be seen from the beginning of the year until January 18,” he explained.

The high tide, which falls on the third Saturday of January, allows the wading and marine birds on the beach to approach the nearest possible point to be monitored and counted correctly and easily, as the tide exceeds three meters, Shah explained. These factors helped the team document new species for the first time in Kuwait, including 300 northern lapwings that birdwatcher Mohammed Al-Hadhina was able



to observe in the Sulaibiya farms this month, he explained.

Shah detailed the methods used during the bird counting event, which included monitoring from observation stations and incidental observations. “Thousands of birds were documented, including species such as the Greater Flamingo, herons (Grey Heron and Western Reef Heron), Kentish Plover, Eurasian Curlew, and Brown-necked Raven. The count revealed the presence of many wintering birds that remain in Kuwait throughout January during their annual migration.”

**Raising awareness**  
The event highlights efforts to sup-



KUWAIT: Various species of migratory and endemic birds are documented in Kuwait during the winter season. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

port environmental protection and raise awareness in terms of protecting migratory and endemic birds of Kuwait, said KEPS President Dr Wijdan Al-Uqab. “The bird counting event included several workshops to deliver several messages, the most important of which is the need to protect and clean beaches and reduce waste of all kinds, especially plastic, in order to preserve biodiversity,” Dr Al-Uqab said in a statement to the press during the event held at the popular café in the Sulaibikhat area under the patronage of the Minister of Social Affairs, Family Affairs and Children Dr Amthal Al-Huwailah. She added that public participation in the event

reflects “the level of interest in the environment in Kuwait.”

The event was also attended by student groups from the 14th season of the Green Schools Program, as well as the ‘Environmental Youth’ and ‘Friends of the Environment’ teams. KEPS has prepared fixed viewing platforms such as binoculars and a photography exhibition of birds of various types, both resident and migratory, in addition to beach cleaning activities and distribution of books for children, Shah noted. He emphasized the need to develop this event so that the bird count is more extensive in future years through a specific mechanism in which volunteers are invited to register on a special platform.



People use binoculars to count birds at the “Winter Bird Count” event organized by Kuwait Environment Protection Society (KEPS) in Sulaibikhat on Saturday, Jan 18, 2025.

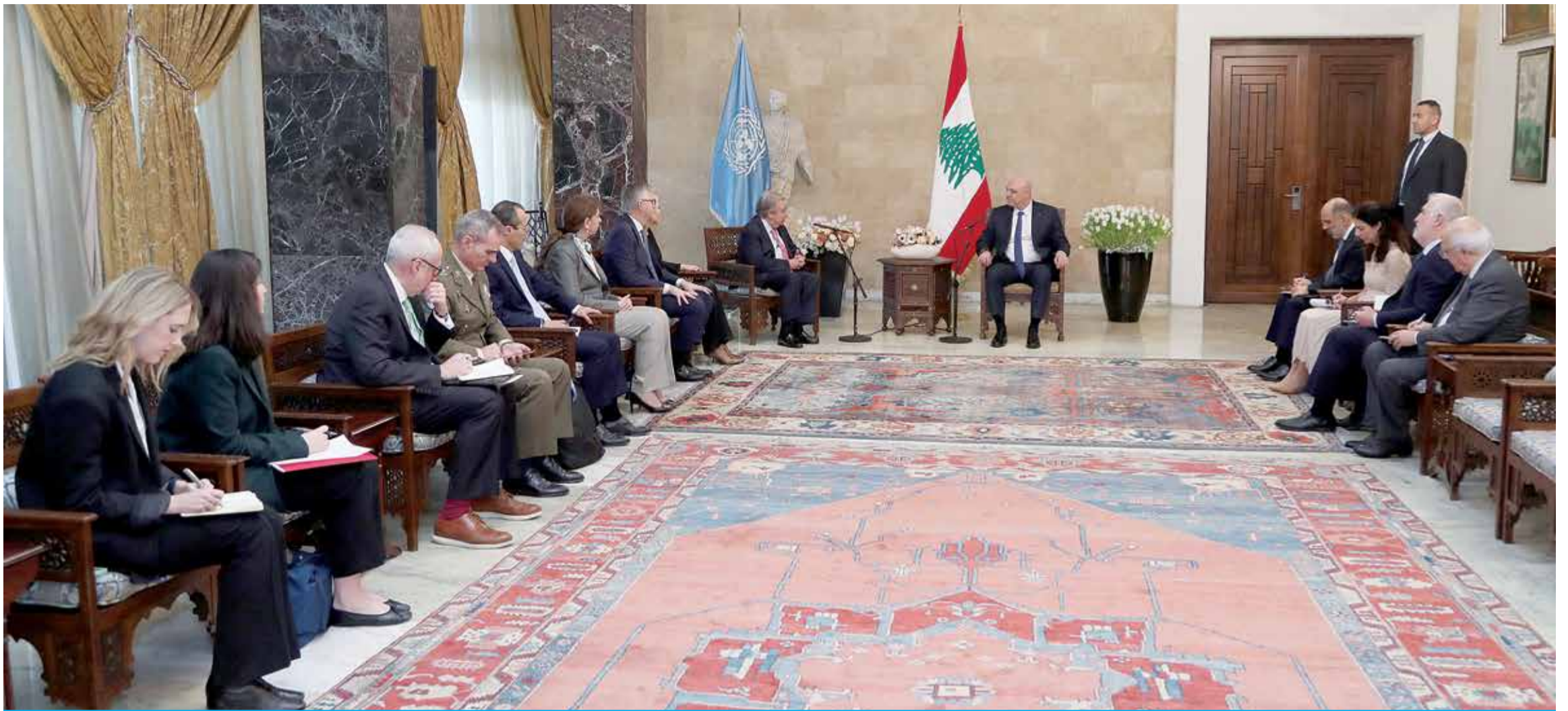


US grounds SpaceX's Starship after fiery mid-air explosion

## India court finds man guilty in notorious hospital rape case

Page 7

Page 7



BEIRUT: Lebanon's new President Joseph Aoun (center right) meeting with the United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres (center left) at the presidential palace in Baabda, east of Beirut on January 18, 2025. — AFP

# UN chief in Beirut as truce looms

## Zionists must withdraw from south Lebanon by Jan 26 deadline: Aoun

BEIRUT: Lebanon's new president said on Saturday that Zionist entity must withdraw from his country's south by the January 26 deadline set to fully implement the Zionist-Hezbollah ceasefire agreed last year. His remarks follow a speech by Hezbollah leader Naim Qassem who accused Zionist entity of hundreds of ceasefire violations, warning it against testing "our patience" and calling on the Lebanese state to be "firm" in its response.

President Joseph Aoun told visiting United Nations chief Antonio Guterres that it was necessary for "Zionist entity forces to withdraw from occupied territories in the south

within the deadline set by the agreement reached on November 27".

"Zionist entity's continued violations on land and in the air... blowing up homes and destroying border villages, completely contradicts what was stated in the ceasefire agreement," a statement from Aoun's office added. Under the November 27 ceasefire deal, which ended two months of all-out war between Zionist entity and Hezbollah, the Lebanese army has 60 days to deploy alongside peacekeepers from the UNIFIL mission in south Lebanon as the Zionist entity army withdraws.

At the same time, Hezbollah is required to pull its forces north of the

Litani River, around 30 kilometers (20 miles) from the border, and dismantle any remaining military infrastructure it has in the south.

Earlier on Saturday, Qassem had called "on the Lebanese state to be firm in confronting violations, now numbering more than hundreds. This cannot continue".

"We have been patient with the violations to give a chance to the Lebanese state responsible for this agreement, along with the international sponsors, but I call on you not to test our patience," he said in a televised speech. Qassem's speech came as Guterres met top Lebanese officials including prime minister-designate Nawaf Salam and Aoun—the former army chief who has vowed that the state would have "a monopoly" on bearing weapons. Analysts say Hezbollah's weakening in the war with Zionist entity allowed Lebanon's deeply divided political class to elect Aoun and to back him in naming Salam, who was presiding judge at the International Criminal Court, as prime minister. But Qassem insisted Hezbollah and ally Amal's backing "is what led to the election of the president by consensus", after around two years of deadlock. "No one can exploit the results of the aggression in domestic politics," he warned. "No one can exclude us from

effective and influential political participation in the country."

After his meeting with Aoun on Saturday, Guterres expressed hope that Lebanon could open "a new chapter of peace". On Friday, Guterres had called for Zionist entity to end its military operations and "occupation" in the south. He also said UN peacekeepers had found more than 100 weapons caches belonging "to Hezbollah or other armed groups". French President Emmanuel Macron was also in Lebanon on Friday and said there must be "accelerated" implementation of the Zionist-Hezbollah ceasefire. — AFP

## Yemen's Houthis declaim their defiance of Zionists

SANAA, Yemen: Thousands of Yemenis crowded the capital Sanaa Friday to express their support for the Iran-backed Houthi rebels, who say they will maintain pressure on Zionist entity despite the imminent Gaza ceasefire. Every week for the past 15 months, people have filled the center of the rebel-held city on the day of prayer and rest to chant their backing for the Palestinians.

This week, with the ceasefire awaiting final Zionist entity cabinet approval before coming into effect on Sunday, was no different. The agreement brokered between Zionist entity and Hamas would see hostages held in war-devastated Gaza being exchanged for hundreds of Palestinian prisoners held by Zionist entity. "We're here to celebrate the victory (of the Palestinians) and of our missiles and drones which forced Zionist entity to halt its aggression in Gaza," said one demonstrator, Zeid Al-Astout.

A Houthi, Khaled Al-Matri, told AFP he supported the ceasefire deal for Gaza. But he added: "We will not give in until the disappearance of the Zionist state, God willing", before breaking into chants of "Death to America, death to Zionist entity!" Since the war in the Gaza Strip began after Hamas's October 7, 2023 attack on Zionist entity, the Houthis have fired dozens of missiles and attack drones at Zionist entity. They have also targeted shipping in the key

Red Sea and Gulf of Aden waterways that are vital to world trade. The Houthis, who say their action is in solidarity with the Palestinians, have themselves seen their positions in Yemen hit by US, Zionist entity and sometimes British air strikes. On Thursday, rebel leader Abdulmalik Al-Houthi in a televised address threatened to keep up their attacks if Zionist entity does not respect the ceasefire with Hamas. "We will watch the implementation of the agreement, and if there are any Zionist entity breaches, massacres or attacks, we will be ready to provide military support to the Palestinian people," he said. It was a speech "full of defiance", said Mohammed Albasha, founder of the US-based risk consultancy Basha Report.

He said the Houthi leader's speech suggested "the potential mobilization of up to one million fighters and a readiness to expand operations if challenged".

Basha said the Houthis "stand ready for future rounds of confrontation". The Houthis, originally from northern Yemen, form part of the Iran-backed "Axis of Resistance", which also includes Hamas and the Hezbollah militant group in Lebanon.

The Houthis ousted the Sanaa government in 2014 and later went on to seize large swathes of the impoverished Arabian Peninsula country. Unlike Hezbollah, which was severely weakened in fighting with Zionist entity before a November 27 ceasefire, the Houthis "are now an indispensable member of the Axis of Resistance", according to Thomas Juneau of the University of Ottawa. The specialist on Yemen said the Houthis have "become much more important for Iran". Their defiance in attacking Zionist entity and its ally the United States over the Gaza war has boosted their popularity in Yemen, a poor nation of 30 million people who are strongly pro-Palestinian.



SANAA: Demonstrators shout slogans and raise their assault rifles during a rally to denounce Zionist entity and in solidarity with Palestinians in the Houthi-controlled capital Sanaa, on January 17, 2025. — AFP

But backing for Yemen's rebels is not universal. "The Houthis have never done anything positive. Their support for Gaza is the only thing enabling them to polish up their image," said 36-year-old Assem Mohammed from the Houthi-controlled Red Sea port city of Hodeida.

Hanaa Abdel Rahman, a teacher who is also from Hodeida, spoke of "this emotional boost (for the Houthis) be-

cause of their support for Palestine". She thought Houthi attacks on Zionist entity would continue, despite the Gaza ceasefire. "I expect they will continue to threaten or to retaliate," she said, adding that she fears a conflagration in Yemen which has suffered a decade of civil war. Thomas Juneau believes the Houthi attacks may cease in the short term, but he doubts this will be permanent. — AFP

## Slew of satellite projects aims to avert wildfires

PARIS: As Los Angeles firefighters battle remaining hotspots more than a week into deadly blazes, scientists and engineers hope growing availability of satellite data will help in the future.

Tech-focused groups are launching new orbiters as space launches get cheaper, while machine learning techniques will sift the torrent of information, fitting it into a wider picture of fire risk in a changing environment. Satellites "can detect from space areas that are dry and prone to wildfire outbreaks... actively flaming and smoldering fires, as well as burnt areas and smoke and trace gas emissions. We can learn from all these types of elements," said Clement Albergel, head of actionable climate information at the European Space Agency. Different satellites have different roles depending on their orbit and sensor payload.

Low Earth orbit (LEO) is generally less than 1,000 kilometers (620 miles) above the surface—compared with up to 14 km for an airliner. Satellites

here offer high-resolution ground images, but see any given point only briefly as they sweep around the planet. Geostationary satellites orbit at around 36,000 km, remaining over the same area on the Earth's surface—allowing for continuous observation but usually at much lower resolution.

As climate change brings growing numbers of wildfires encroaching on human-inhabited areas, that resolution can be crucial. In Los Angeles, "there are satellite observations, but it's very hard to determine—is it my house that's on fire? Where exactly is this?," said WKID Solutions' Natasha Stavros, a wildfire expert who has also worked at NASA.

"Some people stay because they don't really understand... that's where this idea (that) we need more observations available comes from."

Brian Collins, director of Colorado-based non-profit Earth Fire Alliance, plans a new low-orbit satellite "constellation" to complement existing resources. It will sport a sensor with a resolution of five meters (16 feet), much finer than ESA's current Sentinel-2 satellites that can see objects only 10 meters wide.

This means "we're going to learn very quickly that there is more fire on the Earth than we know about today, we're going to find very small fires," Collins predicted. EFA aims to launch four sat-

ellites by the end of 2026, the first in just a few weeks, at a total cost of \$53 million.

That figure is a "drop in the bucket" against the property damage and lives lost to wildfires, said Genevieve Biggs of the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation, which has financially supported EFA's satellite project. It would take the whole planned swarm of 55, costing a total \$400 million, to reach Collins' aim of imaging every point on Earth at least once every 20 minutes.

Dozens of satellites in orbit could "both detect and track fires... at a cadence that allows decisions to be made on the ground," Collins said. Less grandiose efforts include Germany-based OroraTech, which on Tuesday launched the first of at least 14 shoebox-sized FOREST-3 "nanosatellites".

The system will "deliver ultra-fast wildfire alerts and high-quality thermal data," chief executive Martin Langer said in a statement. The Moore foundation is also backing a geostationary satellite project dubbed FUEGO.

Additional data from all these new satellites would be "fantastic", ESA's Albergel said, but the large volume of information can prove problematic. ESA's Sentinel-2 alone sends down one terabyte of data—the storage capacity of a modern high-end laptop—every single day. — AFP

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## International

# Trump comeback restarts Zionist debate on West Bank annexation

## The controversial aspiration was rekindled by Trump election

**JERUSALEM:** When Donald Trump presented his 2020 plan to end the Zionist entity-Palestinian conflict, it included the Zionist entity annexation of swathes of the occupied West Bank, a controversial aspiration that has been revived by his reelection.

In his previous stint as prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu pushed for partial annexation of the West Bank, but he relented in 2020 under international pressure and following a deal to normalize relations with the United Arab Emirates. With Trump returning to the White House, pro-annexation Zionists are hoping to rekindle the idea.

Far-right Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich, himself a settler in the Palestinian territory, said recently that 2025 would be "the year of sovereignty in Judea and Samaria", referring to the biblical name that Zionist entity uses for the West Bank. The territory was part of the British colony of Mandatory Palestine, from which Zionist entity was carved during the 1948 Arab-Zionist entity war, with Jordanian forces taking control of the West Bank during the same conflict.

Zionist entity conquered the territory from Amman in the 1967 Arab-Zionist entity war and has occupied it ever since. Today, many Jews in Zionist entity consider the West Bank part of their historical homeland and reject the idea of a Palestinian state in the territory, with hundreds of thousands having settled in the territory. Excluding Zionist entity-annexed east Jerusalem and its 200,000 Jewish residents, the West Bank is home to around 490,000 Zionist entity's in settlements considered illegal under international law. Around three million Palestinians live in the West Bank.

Zionist entity Ganz, head of the Yesha Council, an umbrella organization for the municipal councils of West Bank settlements, insisted the status quo could not continue. "The State of Zionist entity must make

a decision," he said. Without sovereignty, he added, "no one is responsible for infrastructure, roads, water and electricity."

"We will do everything in our power to apply Zionist entity sovereignty, at least over Area C," he said, referring to territory under sole Zionist entity administration that covers 60 percent of the West Bank, including the vast majority of Zionist entity settlements. Even before taking office, Trump and his incoming administration have made a number of moves that have raised the hopes of pro-annexation Zionist entity's. The president-elect nominated the pro-settlement Baptist minister Mike Huckabee to be his ambassador to Zionist entity. His nominee for secretary of state, Marco Rubio, said this would be "the most pro-Zionist entity administration in American history" and that it would lift US sanctions on settlers. Eugene Kontorovich of the conservative think-tank Misgav Institute pointed out that the Middle East was a very different place to what it was during Trump's first term.

The war against Hamas in Gaza, Zionist entity's hammering of Hezbollah in Lebanon and the fall of Syrian president Bashar Al-Assad, all allies of Zionist entity's arch-foe Iran, have transformed the region.

Even before Trump won November's US presidential election, NGOs were denouncing what they called a de facto annexation, pointing to a spike in land grabs and an overhaul of the bureaucratic and administrative structures Zionist entity uses to manage the West Bank.

An outright, de jure annexation would be another matter, however. Zionist entity cannot expropriate private West Bank land at the moment, but "once annexed, Zionist entity law would allow it. That's a major change", said Aviv Tatarsky, from the Zionist entity anti-settlement organization Ir Amin.



A Zionist woman looks on from a view point in the southern city of Sderot as Zionist forces bombard the northern Gaza Strip on January 18, 2025, a day before a ceasefire is set to take effect. — AFP

He said that in the event that Zionist entity annexes Area C, Palestinians there would likely not be granted residence permits and the accompanying rights. The permits, which Palestinians in east Jerusalem received, allow people freedom of movement within Zionist entity and the right to use Zionist entity courts. West Bank Palestinians can resort to the supreme court, but not lower ones.

Tatarsky said that for Palestinians across the West

Bank, annexation would constitute "a nightmare scenario". Over 90 percent of them live in areas A and B, under full or partial control of the Palestinian Authority. But, Tatarsky pointed out, "their daily needs and routine are indissociable from Area C," the only contiguous portion of the West Bank, where most agricultural lands are and which breaks up areas A and B into hundreds of territorial islets. — AFP

## 'Revenge tour': US news media braces for Trump return

**NEW YORK:** US media are bracing for the White House return of Donald Trump, who previously helped to boost news consumption but is now prompting outlets to protect themselves from retaliation — legal or otherwise — from the famously grudge-bearing Republican.

News organizations are girding themselves for a legal assault from Trump personally, as well as federal agencies that could theoretically frustrate broadcast licenses, comb through tax affairs and otherwise make life difficult for organizations that do not toe the line. New York University journalism professor Adam Penenberg told AFP that US news outlets, who normally compete in a fierce market, would have to cooperate to face down the threat posed by Trump.

"Trump's second term promises to be less reality show and more revenge tour, especially for the press," he said. "The question isn't whether he'll attack the media. He will. But can the media resist bending under the weight of those attacks?" Early moves indicated that some US media were taking an initially conciliatory approach to Trump this term, with major broadcaster ABC opting to settle a defamation suit brought by the billionaire rather than fight it. The US news media landscape is also changing in both form and ownership.

With an increasing number of US consumers getting their news from social media, Meta's billionaire owner Mark Zuckerberg announced the end of Facebook's US fact-checking program, which had previously drawn Trump's ire. The Washington Post, owned by tech mogul Jeff Bezos, declined to endorse a candidate for president, and in recent days spiked a cartoon critical of tycoons carrying favor with the Republican.

"The news media can prepare by reinforcing legal defenses, building coalitions between outlets, and fortifying cybersecurity to guard against hacks and leaks," said Penenberg. The New York Times has repeatedly drawn rebukes from Trump over its persistent, attention-grabbing reporting of his political, personal, financial and legal problems. It warned that smaller news organizations may be unable to stand up to legal threats from Trump.

"For smaller, less financially secure news organizations, the expense of defending themselves in lawsuits from Mr Trump and his allies may be enough to encourage self-censorship," it said in a grave editorial. For some, the crackdown has already begun.

Trump has sued an Iowa daily, the Des Moines Register, and an Iowa opinion pollster, for a survey that predicted Kamala Harris would win the state that the Republican ultimately carried. The Knight First Amendment Institute at Columbia University said the move would "intimidate" others.

A few days earlier, the Disney-owned ABC network agreed to pay \$15 million in damages to settle Trump's defamation lawsuits against its news division and a journalist, a move perceived by some as a climb-down. CBS is also considering settling lawsuits from Trump, who had accused its popular "60 Minutes" show of favoring Kamala Harris, the Wall Street Journal reported. CBS did not respond to a request for comment.

Several organizations are reportedly reviewing their insurance coverage for libel or other litigation from hostile officials, while one non-profit is reviewing its compliance with labor regulations. Other media are working to protect sources in the event of whistleblower investigations. Penenberg, a former senior editor, stressed that while newsrooms should prepare for lawsuits, regulatory harassment and pressure campaigns, many US presidents have governed with deep hostility to the media. — AFP

## Trump inauguration moved indoors due to extreme cold

**WASHINGTON:** Donald Trump confirmed that his inauguration as US president on Monday will move indoors due to expected freezing weather, undercutting the Republican's hopes for a grandiose spectacle to kick off his second term.

"There is an Arctic blast sweeping the Country," Trump wrote on his Truth Social feed on Friday. "Therefore, I have ordered the Inauguration Address, in addition to prayers and other speeches, to be delivered in the United States Capitol Rotunda." The change of plan means Trump will not stand on the Capitol steps overlooking the National Mall, which traditionally hosts a large crowd to welcome new presidents. The Rotunda, an ornate, round hall under the dome of Congress, can typically only hold a few hundred people.

Washington is forecast to be well below freezing on Monday, with gusty winds adding to the cold.

Preparations have already been made in Washington for a huge influx of visitors — including thousands of chairs neatly lined up on the Mall — but most will now have to watch on television.

It's the first time the emergency measure has been taken since the 1985 inauguration of Ronald Reagan, also due to dangerously cold weather. In his post, Trump said that "various Dignitaries and Guests" will attend the events inside the Capitol, including prayers, the inaugural address and the singing of the anthem.

The Republican, who has built a political brand around his large rallies, said supporters could watch the event on a live feed in Washington's Capital One sports arena — and that he would go there after.

Trump — who at 78 will be the oldest person ever to assume the presidency — said the ceremonies in the Rotunda "will be a very beautiful experience for all, and especially for the large TV audience!"

"We will open Capital One Arena on Monday for



WASHINGTON, DC: Protesters rally outside the Eisenhower Executive Office Building next to the White House during the "People's March on Washington" in Washington, DC, on January 18, 2025. — AFP

LIVE viewing of this Historic event, and to host the Presidential Parade. I will join the crowd at Capital One, after my Swearing In." Trump supporter Matthew Medill, visiting Washington from more balmy California, said some will be disappointed, but "we are expecting a lot of excitement and a lot of jubilation — it doesn't matter what the weather is."

After his first inauguration in 2017, Trump was infuriated by reports that his crowd on the Mall was distinctly smaller than the turnout for Barack Obama in 2009. Trump claimed more than 1.5 million supporters thronged the Mall, far in excess of Obama's crowd, and his spokesman announced that the inauguration had been the most attended ever. However, this was immediately proven to be a lie, with aerial photos showing a far sparser crowd at Trump's event than at Obama's.

The switch this time means Trump will miss out

altogether on the traditional address to a sea of people, while looking out toward the soaring Washington Monument.

However, as a former reality TV star, Trump will embrace the potential for television-friendly theatrics, both in the elegant Rotunda and afterward in the arena. "This will be a very beautiful experience for all, and especially for the large TV audience!" Trump posted. Capital One Arena, home of the Washington Wizards basketball team and ice hockey's Washington Capitals, has a seating capacity of around 20,000.

Before the decision to scrap the outdoor event, more than 220,000 tickets were distributed to the public via lawmakers' offices. People braving the cold can still catch a glimpse of the newly sworn-in president as he travels down Pennsylvania Avenue from the Capitol to the White House. — AFP

## What are the details of Gaza ceasefire deal?

**JERUSALEM:** International mediators said this week that 33 hostages held by Hamas in Gaza would be released in the first stage of a ceasefire deal for the Palestinian territory agreed with Zionist entity. In return, Zionist entity is to free hundreds of Palestinian prisoners starting from Sunday. Below are the key details of the 42-day first phase as set out by mediators Qatar and the United States, and Zionist entity and Palestinian officials.

### Prisoner-hostage swap

Militants will release 33 Zionist entity hostages in the first phase of the agreement, Qatari Prime Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim Al-Thani said. They will comprise "civilian women and female recruits, as well as children, elderly people... civilian ill people and wounded", he said. Government spokesman David Mencer said Zionist entity was "prepared to pay a heavy price — in the hundreds" in exchange for the 33 hostages.

A Zionist entity official said the final number would depend on how many of the 33 hostages are alive. Two sources close to Hamas told AFP that three Zi-

onist entity women soldiers would be the first to be released on Sunday evening, although the group refers to all Zionist entity of military age as soldiers.

On Friday, the Zionist entity justice ministry published a list of 95 Palestinian prisoners, the majority of them women, who are earmarked for release in the first exchange. The 33 are among 94 hostages abducted to Gaza during Hamas's October 7, 2023 attack on Zionist entity, which triggered the war. The total includes 34 captives the Zionist entity military has declared dead.

A Zionist entity official said three reception points had been set up, one each at Kerem Shalom and Erez, both border crossings with Gaza, and one in Reim to the east of the territory. There, the hostages would be joined by doctors and mental health specialists before being "transported via helicopter or vehicle" to hospitals in Zionist entity. Qatar's Sheikh Mohammed said the number of Palestinian prisoners to be released in the second and third phases would be "finalized" during the initial stage.

During the initial 42 days, Zionist entity forces will withdraw from Gaza's densely populated areas to "allow for the swap of prisoners, as well as the swap of remains and the return of the displaced (Palestinian) people", Qatar's prime minister said. The Zionist entity military official said that the army had drawn up "a revised defensive plan" involving "strengthening defensive measures along the Gaza Strip border". At the same time,



GAZA STRIP: A man plays with fireworks at a camp for displaced Palestinians in Bureij in the central Gaza Strip on January 18, 2025. — AFP

Zionist entity forces would "withdraw from specific locations and routes within the Gaza Strip," the official said.

"Residents will not be allowed to return to areas where (Zionist entity) troops are present or near the Zionist entity-Gaza border." Negotiations for a second phase would commence on the "16th day" after the first phase's implementation, another Zionist entity official said earlier in the week.

Zionist entity media reported that under the proposed deal, Zionist entity would maintain a buffer zone within Gaza during the first phase. Zionist entity forces were expected to remain up to

"800 meters (yards) inside Gaza stretching from Rafah in the south to Beit Hanun in the north," according to a source close to Hamas. Zionist entity forces would not fully withdraw from Gaza until "all hostages are returned", the second Zionist entity official said.

The source close to Hamas said Zionist entity forces would allow displaced Palestinians to return through an electronic checkpoint equipped with cameras. "No Zionist entity forces will be present, and Palestinian militants will be barred from passing through the checkpoint during the return of displaced persons," he said. — AFP

## International

# India court finds man guilty in notorious hospital rape case

## Brutal rape and murder of doctor spotlights the chronic issue of violence against women in India

**KOLKATA:** An Indian court on Saturday found a 33-year-old man guilty for the rape and murder of a doctor, a crime that sparked nationwide protests and hospital strikes last year. The discovery of the victim's bloodied body at a government hospital in the eastern city of Kolkata last August once again highlighted the chronic issue of violence against women in the world's most populous country.

It led to demands by doctors at government hospitals for additional security, with thousands of citizens in Kolkata and elsewhere in India joining the doctors' protests in solidarity. The trial of defendant Sanjoy Roy was fast-tracked through India's normally glacial legal system and arguments in the case concluded a little over a week ago.

"The sentence will be delivered on Monday," presiding judge Anirban Das said after finding Roy, a civic volunteer in the hospital, guilty of rape and murder. Roy has consistently maintained his innocence and again told the court that he was not guilty. "I have been framed," he said. Roy was brought to court by a prison van and greeted by a crowd of protesters, held at bay by police officers, demanding he be given the death penalty.

"Hang him, hang him," they chanted. The sentiment was echoed by the victim's family, none of

whom have been identified in keeping with Indian law around the reporting of sexual violence cases.

"The common man will lose faith in the judiciary if he is not handed down the death penalty," the victim's mother, seated just a few meters from Roy when the verdict was read out, told AFP.

Her father added: "He brutally snuffed out the life of our daughter. He deserves the same fate."

The trainee doctor was found raped and murdered in a seminar room of the hospital last year. The crime led to nationwide outrage and prolonged protests by doctors across the state, demanding justice for the victim and stronger security measures in government hospitals.

Roy was arrested a day after the victim's body was discovered. India's Supreme Court set up a national task force after the protests that suggested ways to enhance safety measures in the government hospitals. The victim's father at one of the protest marches in October told AFP that his family was "devastated". "My daughter's soul will not rest in peace until she gets justice," he said. The gruesome nature of the attack drew comparisons with the 2012 gang rape and murder of a young woman on a Delhi bus, which also sparked weeks of nationwide protests. — AFP



**KOLKATA:** Social activists shout slogans near the Sealdah Civil and Criminal Court in Kolkata on January 18, 2025. — AFP

## US grounds SpaceX's Starship after fiery mid-air explosion

**WASHINGTON:** The United States on Friday grounded SpaceX's Starship and ordered Elon Musk's company to investigate why the spaceship spectacularly disintegrated in a fiery cascade over the Caribbean during its latest test mission.

Authorities in the Turks and Caicos Islands confirmed they diverted all flights from their airspace during the incident and urged residents not to touch fallen debris, warning it could be hazardous.

"The FAA (Federal Aviation Administration) is requiring SpaceX to perform a mishap investigation into the loss of the Starship vehicle during launch operations on Jan 16," the agency said. "There are no reports of public injury, and the FAA is working with SpaceX and appropriate authorities to confirm reports of public property damage on Turks and Caicos."

It added that during the event, it briefly activated a "Debris Response Area" protocol to slow aircraft outside the area where the debris was falling or stop aircraft at their departure location. "Several aircraft requested to divert due to low fuel levels while holding outside impacted areas."

Under established procedures, SpaceX will now be required to carry out a "mishap investigation"—including the identification of any corrective actions,



In this handout image, debris from the SpaceX Starship is seen in the sky near Providenciales, Turks and Caicos on January 16, 2025. — AFP

which the FAA will review before determining the launch vehicle can return to flight. Alternatively, the company may seek an early return to flight if it can demonstrate sufficient safety measures and confirm

the mishap posed no public risk.

The government of the Turks and Caicos Islands, a British-controlled archipelago, confirmed the diversion of all flights during the incident, which lit up social media with dazzling photos and videos of the meteor-like shower of debris. Officials also met with UK Space Agency experts and reiterated warnings to residents to avoid fallen debris.

"If possible, take a photograph of the object (without touching it) alongside another object for scale," a public advisory read, emphasizing, "Space debris remains the property of the spacecraft owner."

Starship is the biggest and most powerful rocket ever built, and is key to Musk's ambitions of colonizing Mars. NASA hopes to use a modified version of the rocket as a human lunar lander for its Artemis missions to return to the Moon. Thursday's uncrewed launch was Starship's seventh orbital test, and the first involving a taller, upgraded version of the rocket.

SpaceX, which dominates the commercial launch market through its workhorse Falcon 9 rocket, underscored its technical prowess by catching Starship's first stage booster in the "chopstick" arms of its launch tower for a second time. But the triumph was short-lived when teams lost contact with the upper-stage vehicle. SpaceX later confirmed it had undergone "rapid unscheduled disassembly," the company's euphemism for an explosion.

"Success is uncertain, but entertainment is guaranteed!" Musk quipped on X, sharing one of the many viral clips of the event. He added the cause of the explosion appeared to be an "oxygen/fuel leak" that caused an excess buildup of pressure. — AFP

## Sudan war turning 'more dangerous' for civilians: UN

**PORT SUDAN:** The United Nations human rights chief on Friday warned that the war in Sudan is becoming "more dangerous" for civilians, following reports of army-allied militias carrying out ethnic-based attacks on minorities. "The situation for civilians in Sudan is already desperate and there is evidence of the commission of war crimes and other atrocity crimes," UN Human Rights Commissioner Volker Turk said in a statement on Friday.

"I fear the situation is now taking a further, even more dangerous turn," he added. The Sudanese army, at war with rival paramilitaries since April 2023, led an offensive this week on Al-Jazira state, recapturing its capital Wad Madani from the Rapid Support Forces (RSF). In the last week alone, the UN human rights office documented at least 21 deaths in just two attacks in Al-Jazira, saying that the actual number of attacks and of civilians killed "are very likely higher". The two attacks took place in two camps, located about 40 kilometers (25 miles) from Wad Madani.

Though the RSF has become notorious for alleged ethnic-based violence, reports have also emerged of civilians being targeted on the basis of ethnicity in army-controlled areas. On Thursday, the US treasury department announced sanctions against army chief Abdel Fattah Al-Burhan, accusing the army of attacking schools, markets and hospitals, as well as using food deprivation as a weapon of war.

It came a week after the US also slapped sanctions on RSF commander Mohamed Hamdan Daglo, accusing his group of committing genocide. Responding to recent reports from US officials of the Sudanese army using chemical weapons, spokesperson of the UN human rights chief Ravina Shamdasani on Friday said that due to limited access, the UN "has not specifically documented" such practices during the war.

At a briefing on Friday, Shamdasani described the reports as "very worrying", adding that "they do require further investigation". She said that the UN had documented "the use of extremely heavy weaponry in populated areas", including air strikes on marketplaces. Both sides have been accused of targeting civilians and indiscriminately shelling residential areas, with the RSF specifically accused of ethnic cleansing, systematic sexual violence and laying siege to entire towns. The war has killed tens of thousands, uprooted more than 12 million and pushed the country to the brink of famine, creating what the United Nations describes as one of the world's worst humanitarian crises. — AFP



**PRAYAGRAJ:** Police monitor the situation via screens at the Integrated Command and Control Center, set up to manage and control the crowd, during the Maha Kumbh Mela festival in Prayagraj on January 17, 2025. — AFP

## India uses AI to stop stampedes at biggest gathering

**PRAYAGRAJ, India:** Keen to improve India's abysmal crowd management record at large-scale religious events, organizers of the world's largest human gathering are using artificial intelligence to try to prevent stampedes.

Organizers predict up to 400 million pilgrims will visit the Kumbh Mela, a millennia-old sacred show of Hindu piety and ritual bathing that began Monday and runs for six weeks. Deadly crowd crushes are a notorious feature of Indian religious festivals, and the Kumbh Mela, with its unfathomable throngs of devotees, has a grim track record of stampedes.

"We want everyone to go back home happily after having fulfilled their spiritual duties," Amit Kumar, a senior police officer heading tech operations in the festival, told AFP. "AI is helping us avoid reaching that critical mass in sensitive places."

More than 400 people died after being trampled or drowned at the Kumbh Mela on a single day of the festival in 1954, one of the largest tolls in a crowd-related disaster globally.

Another 36 people were crushed to death in 2013, the last time the festival was staged in the northern city of Prayagraj. But this time, authorities say the technology they have deployed will help them gather

accurate estimates of crowd sizes, allowing them to be better prepared for potential trouble.

Police say they have installed around 300 cameras at the festival site and on roads leading to the sprawling encampment, mounted on poles and a fleet of overhead drones. Not far from the spiritual center of the festival at the confluence of the Ganges and Yamuna rivers, the network is overseen in a glass-paneled command and control room by a small army of police officers and technicians. "We can look at the entire Kumbh Mela from here," said Kumar. "There are camera angles where we cannot even see complete bodies and we have to count using heads or torsos."

Kumar said the footage fed into an AI algorithm that gives its handlers an overall estimate of a crowd stretching for miles in every direction, cross-checked against data from railways and bus operators.

"We are using AI to track people flow, crowd density at various inlets, adding them up and then interpolating from there," he added. The system sounds the alarm if sections of the crowd get so concentrated that they pose a safety threat.

The Kumbh Mela is rooted in Hindu mythology, a battle between deities and demons for control of a pitcher containing the nectar of immortality. Organizers say the scale of this year's festival is that of a temporary country—with numbers expected to total around the combined populations of the United States and Canada. Some six million devotees took a dip in the river on the first morning of the festival, according to official estimates. With a congregation that size, Kumar said that some degree of crowd crush is inevitable. — AFP

### News in Brief

#### Dozens hurt in Spanish ski resort accident

**MADRID:** A chairlift broke at a Spanish ski resort near the French border on Saturday, injuring around 35 people, some of them seriously, regional officials and the media said. "We are talking about around 30 to 35 people injured, including serious, very serious and less serious injuries," Miguel Ángel Clavero, the director of emergencies for the Aragon region, where the incident occurred, told public television TVE. "Apparently, there was a failure in the return pulley of one of the chairlifts and this caused the cable to lose tension, causing some chairs to fall and others to remain hanging," Clavero said. — AFP

#### Man survives clinging to high-speed German train

**FRANKFURT:** A man clung on to the outside of a German high-speed train, surviving unscathed as it barreled along at up to 282 kilometers (172 miles) an hour, police said Friday. The 40-year-old Hungarian man was taking a cigarette break at a platform in Bavaria when the train doors slammed shut, prompting him to jump onto the bracket between two carriages. The unidentified man later told police he opted for the daredevil act because his luggage was still onboard the Intercity Express (ICE) train headed cross-country from Munich to Luebeck. — AFP

#### Germany may send troops to future Ukraine buffer zone

**BERLIN:** Germany's defense minister said he was open to sending German soldiers to Ukraine to help secure a demilitarized zone there if a ceasefire were agreed with Russia, in remarks published Saturday. In an interview with the *Sueddeutsche Zeitung* newspaper, Boris Pistorius also said Germany should aim to spend around three percent of GDP on defense. US President-elect Donald Trump wants members of the NATO military alliance to devote five percent of their national output on defense, a demand that has already been rejected as too high by German Chancellor Olaf Scholz. — AFP

#### Belarus leader frees 23 political prisoners in pre-election pardon

**WARSAW:** Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko on Saturday freed 23 political prisoners, state media reported, the latest mass pardoning ahead of next week's presidential election. The authoritarian leader, in power since 1994, is set to extend his rule next weekend in a contest that his critics, the West and independent rights groups have slammed as nothing more than a show. Lukashenko and his riot police cracked down hard on tens of thousands of protesters who took to the streets in 2020 to protest widespread allegations of electoral fraud in that year's presidential vote. — AFP

#### Cambodian villager killed by anti-tank landmine

**PHNOM PENH:** A Cambodian villager was killed after he drove a truck loaded with cassava over an anti-tank landmine on his farm, an official said on Saturday. The incident happened in northwestern Battambang province on Friday when the unidentified villager "ran over an anti-tank landmine, the remnant of war," Heng Ratana, director general of the government's Cambodian Mine Action Centre (CMAC), said in a Facebook post. Two Cambodian deminers were killed on Thursday while trying to remove a decades-old anti-tank mine from a rice field that was once a battlefield between government forces and Khmer Rouge soldiers. — AFP

# Business

SUNDAY, JANUARY 19, 2025

## Zain named Best Telecom Company in Kuwait and Best Digital Transformation Company

### Zain solidifies its leading position with two prestigious awards

KUWAIT: Reinforcing its solid position in the Kuwaiti market and reflecting its continued leadership in the local telecom sector, Zain has been recognized with the prestigious titles of Best Telecom Company in Kuwait and Best Digital Transformation Company for the sixth time. The awards were presented at the 12th annual Excellence Awards ceremony organized by International Finance in Dubai, honoring achievements for the year 2024.

Waleed Al-Khashti, Zain Kuwait's Chief Corporate Affairs and Relations Officer, received the awards during the ceremony, which celebrated the most outstanding companies and organizations across the Middle East and North Africa region. International Finance, a renowned London-based publication specializing in annual rankings in economics and business, hosted the event, bringing together leading organizations from various vital sectors in the region.

This achievement underscores Zain's unwavering efforts to lead the telecom and digital innovation landscape, reinforcing its position as a market leader in Kuwait. The awards add to a series of accolades the company recently received from local, regional, and global entities, reflecting its consistent excellence in both technological advancements and contributions to community service initiatives.

The awards highlight the distinguished role of Kuwait's private sector in driving economic growth and advancing digital transformation. These achievements also reflect Zain's strategic vision of fostering a competitive edge in the digital era through world-class services, innovative solutions, and exceptional customer experiences. This recognition reflects Zain's leadership across its operational and commercial activities, particularly in driving digital transformation and delivering innovative digital services and exceptional customer experiences. Through strong partnerships with tech-



The awards reflect Zain's commitment to delivering innovative experiences and empowering digital transformation.

nology leaders, Zain is spearheading Kuwait's digital transformation journey, setting new benchmarks in advanced 5G and artificial intelligence technologies, and contributing to the nation's development objectives.

As a leading digital service provider, Zain is committed to harnessing the potential of artificial intelligence to drive digital transformation and foster innovation. The company continues to advance its efforts in offering AI-driven innovative services and



Waleed Al-Khashti receives both awards in Dubai.

automating 5.5G networks, emphasizing the pivotal role AI tools and applications play in transforming telecommunications networks by enhancing performance, quality, operations, maintenance, resource optimization, analytics, and more.

Zain offers a comprehensive portfolio of solutions for businesses, including cloud computing services, cybersecurity solutions, AI-powered drone technologies, 5G solutions, and other cutting-edge technologies. These

offerings are tailored to meet the needs of government and private institutions, promoting economic growth and supporting the country's development goals.

At its annual ceremony, International Finance celebrated the remarkable achievements of organizations excelling in economics, finance, and business, with a particular focus on companies that have significantly contributed to improving the business environment across the region.

## Americans will be hit by 'Trump tariff tax': Canada

MONTREAL: Americans will be hit by a "Trump tariffs tax" if the US president-elect increases customs duties on Canadian products, the Canadian foreign minister said Friday, pledging a hard-hitting response in any trade war.

Donald Trump, who returns to the White House next week, has said he plans to slap 25 percent tariffs on Canadian imports as part of his economic and foreign policy plans that also target Mexico, China and other trade partners. "This would be the biggest trade war between Canada and the US in decades," Foreign Minister Melanie Joly said. "The Americans would be starting a trade war against us."

"We are ready to put maximum pressure," she said at a press conference in Washington, adding that Canada has a series of measures prepared if Trump carries out his threat, which would have a major impact on Canadian consumers and jobs. A government source told AFP that Ottawa is considering higher duties on goods from the United States including steel products, ceramics like toilets and sinks, glassware and orange juice—in a first phase of tariffs that could be extended.

"We will be strong and unequivocal in our defense of Canada and Canadians," said outgoing Prime Minister Justin Trudeau. "The proposed tariffs would put American jobs at risk, raise prices for American consumers, put our collective security at risk and raise costs all across the continent."

One scenario from Scotiabank suggests that a trade war could cause Canadian GDP to fall by more than five percent, increase unemployment significantly and fuel inflation. — AFP

## IMF: UK to have third strongest G7 growth in 2025

WASHINGTON/LONDON: Britain is set to have the fastest growth among major European economies this year, according to the International Monetary Fund, a boost to finance minister Rachel Reeves who is under pressure over a slowdown since her party came to power in July. The IMF on Friday raised its forecast for British growth for 2025 by 0.1 percentage points to 1.6 percent, making it the third-strongest among the Group of Seven advanced economies after the United States and Canada. The IMF outlook for British gross domestic product growth in 2026 remained at 1.5 percent, again the third-fastest in the G7 and unchanged from its October estimate.

IMF Chief Economist Pierre-Olivier Gourinchas said the "modest" growth upgrade reflected a net positive impact from Reeves' first budget on Oct. 30 - as greater public investment would outweigh headwinds created by higher taxes - as well as rising household incomes and Bank of England rate cuts.

The BoE was likely to cut rates around once per quarter in 2025, he added.

Responding to the upgrade for 2025, Reeves said she would "go further and faster" to deliver economic growth. The Bank of England forecast growth of 1.5 percent in 2025, partly reflecting a short-term boost to the economy from a temporary increase in public spending announced by Reeves on Oct. 30. — AFP

## US Treasury to take extraordinary steps to avert debt default

WASHINGTON: The US Treasury Department will start taking "extraordinary measures" next week to avoid risking a default on government debt, Secretary Janet Yellen said Friday, days before President-elect Donald Trump takes office. With the government reaching its borrowing limit, the department would start making the moves on Tuesday, the day after the inauguration, Yellen said in a letter to congressional leaders.

That will mean Trump's administration has to grapple immediately with the issue of the debt ceiling—the legal limit on government borrowing to pay bills already incurred.

In the past, Congress has routinely voted to lift this bar, but that tool has become a contentious issue, with Republican budget hawks calling for drastic spending reductions instead. "Extraordinary measures" are a way for the Treasury to ensure that the US government can keep paying its bills and avoid a hugely destabilizing debt default. On Friday, Yellen said: "The period of time that extraordinary measures

## At VW home base, Scholz vows to revive economy

WOLFSBURG: Chancellor Olaf Scholz on Friday laid out his vision to revitalize Germany's ailing economy at a campaign event in the historic home base of crisis-hit auto titan Volkswagen.

In front of a crowd of supporters, Scholz defended his government's record on the economy—which has been battered by an energy crisis, high inflation and a manufacturing slump—while pledging to boost investments. The embattled chancellor, facing a general election next month, spoke in Wolfsburg, home to the historic headquarters of Volkswagen, whose rapidly fading fortunes have come to symbolize the broader crisis pummeling Europe's traditional industrial powerhouse.

How to rekindle Germany's beleaguered economy, which shrank in 2024 for the second straight year, has become a key campaign issue ahead of the February 23 vote.

Scholz, from the center-left SPD, conceded the economy faced "challenges", in particular because it was "globally interconnected". But he said this contributed to Germany's economic strength, adding: "We have to defend it by investing here in Germany."

"We need new growth that gives us the opportunity to have jobs throughout the country," Scholz told the roughly 1,500 supporters who turned up. Scholz outlined ways he planned to bolster the economy, such as greater investments in green industries, more renewable energy generation and a reduction of red tape. He also called for an overhaul of Germany's so-called debt brake that limits government borrowing, which critics say has prevented much-needed spending in a vast range of sectors in recent years.

Scholz, frequently criticized for his apparent lack of charisma, faces an uphill battle to win re-election. The three-party coalition he headed was riven by



WASHINGTON: Senator Michael Bennet asks questions to US investor and hedge fund manager Scott Bessent during a Senate Finance Committee hearing on his nomination to be Secretary of the Treasury, on Capitol Hill in Washington, DC. — AFP

may last is subject to considerable uncertainty." She noted there are challenges to forecasting the government's payments and revenue months into the future.

"I respectfully urge Congress to act promptly to protect the full faith and credit of the United States," Yellen wrote. For now, she said the Treasury would hold off investments of the Civil Service Retirement and Disability Fund not immediately required to pay beneficiaries. It would redeem a part of investments held by the fund, and also suspend added invest-

ments of amounts credited to the Postal Service Retiree Health Benefits Fund. The funds will be made whole once the debt limit is raised or suspended.

"Federal retirees and employees will be unaffected by these actions," she said.

In mid-2023, US lawmakers voted to suspend the debt limit after weeks of fraught negotiations, to eliminate the threat of a default. The limit was reinstated on January 2 and set at \$36.1 trillion, matching the total debt outstanding on the previous day. During December budget negotiations in Congress, Trump insisted the debt ceiling be raised or even eliminated altogether, although he was unsuccessful at the time.

On Thursday, Trump's Treasury secretary nominee Scott Bessent told lawmakers at his confirmation hearing that he would work with Trump to remove the limit if the incoming president wanted to do so.

He also vowed that the United States would not default on its debt if he became Treasury chief.

Earlier this month, Fitch Ratings said the United States faces "significant fiscal policy challenges in 2025." It pointed to the debt limit, appropriations and "tax cuts in the context of already large deficits and an increasing debt burden." "We believe it is unlikely that these will be resolved expeditiously because of long-standing weaknesses in the federal government's budgetary process and a narrow Republican House majority," Fitch added. — AFP



WOLFSBURG: German Chancellor Olaf Scholz and Chairwoman of the General and Group Works Council of the Volkswagen Group Daniela Cavallo give a press statement in Wolfsburg, Germany, on January 17, 2025. — AFP

infighting and imploded spectacularly in November amid a row over the budget, paving the way for next month's snap election. His Social Democrats (SPD) are languishing far behind in opinion polls on around 16 percent. That compares to around 30 percent for the conservative opposition led by Friedrich Merz—who is widely expected to become the next chancellor—while the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) is second on about 20 percent after a recent surge in popularity.

Scholz took aim at Merz's CDU party, saying it wanted to introduce "tax cuts for the wealthy" rather than focus on investing more.

Despite the chancellor's upbeat message, the mood in Wolfsburg, a city of 128,000 people in Lower Saxony state, was bleak. After three months of bitter negotiations, management and unions struck a deal last month that will see 35,000 VW jobs cut by 2030 as Europe's biggest carmaker seeks to drastically reduce costs. VW—hit hard by high manufacturing costs and fierce competition in key mar-

ket China—ultimately pulled back from a threat to shutter factories in Germany for the first time in its 87-year history. Kathrin Kuehne, a pensioner who worked for 27 years at the automaker, lamented that the days when the group "brought us prosperity" were long gone.

The current crisis at the automaker, whose 10 brands range from namesake VW to Porsche and Seat, was "a catastrophe", the SPD activist told AFP as she attended Scholz's event.

In his speech, Scholz insisted that his government had rescued jobs at the carmaker while calling to keep "moving forward" with ramping up production of electric vehicles. Sales of EVs have been slowing, hitting carmakers worldwide, while VW in particular has been criticized for a mismanaged shift to electric, with critics contending it has allowed Chinese competitors to gain ground. Peter Harweg, a Wolfsburg resident who works for an auto supplier but was not at Scholz's speech, sounded disillusioned with politics in general. — AFP



## Business

# Burgan Bank signs purchase agreement to acquire United Gulf Bank in Bahrain

## Agreement in line with its strategy for reallocating assets, building new revenue streams

KUWAIT: Burgan Bank K.P.S.C. announced the signing of a Share Purchase Agreement (SPA) to acquire a 100 percent stake in United Gulf Bank BSC (UGB), a wholesale bank licensed and headquartered in Bahrain, from United Gulf Holding Company BSC (UGH) for \$190 million. This transaction is in line with the Bank's strategy to diversify its asset portfolio by focusing on stable and less fluctuating markets, particularly Kuwait and the wider GCC region.

The agreement follows Burgan Bank's receipt of all required regulatory approvals in both Kuwait and in Bahrain. The two parties will commence the ownership transfer process, the last step in this transaction, with expectations to be completed within the first quarter of 2025.

UGB has a wholesale banking license in Bahrain with an 'Islamic window' and is supervised by the Central Bank of

Bahrain (CBB). It also owns a 60 percent stake in Kamco Investment Company (Kamco Invest), an investment company licensed and regulated by the Capital Markets Authority - Kuwait (CMA) and the Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK).

Commenting on the acquisition, Tony Daher, Group CEO of Burgan Bank, said: "The acquisition marks a significant milestone for our Group and is aligned with the Bank's strategic pillars of diversifying its assets, enhancing its competitiveness and building new income streams. This acquisition provides Burgan with an opportunity to tap into key high-growth sectors of Islamic financing and investments, while creating significant cross-selling and up-selling opportunities, in addition to various integrational synergies."

Furthermore, the transaction will strengthen the Bank's offerings to its clients, providing them with access to



Tony Daher, Group CEO at Burgan Bank.

the Kamco Invest platform. Kamco Invest currently offers a comprehensive range of investment solutions covering

asset management, investment banking and brokerage. It is considered one of the largest asset managers in the region with AUM of \$16 billion and has notable presence in key capital markets, including the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and the United Kingdom.

"The acquisition will solidify the business relationship between Burgan Bank and Kamco Invest, enabling both entities to deliver a seamless and integrated suite of financial services, leveraging their combined expertise to enhance client experiences and meet their diverse and evolving financial needs effectively," added Daher.

Daher explained that Burgan Bank continues to be driven by its vision to become the most modern and advanced bank in Kuwait in the ambitious steps it takes to achieve sustainable growth and expansion. The Bank's confident strides are further supported and guided by its

focus on strategic priorities – most notably the redistribution of assets – keeping pace with digital transformation, developing human capital, and achieving environmental, social, and governance (ESG) excellence. Together, these efforts aim to provide a distinctive banking experience for Burgan's customers that lives up to their aspirations and meets their needs. This latest acquisition comes following the sale of the Bank of Baghdad and the partial sale of Burgan Bank Turkey in 2023, which is a testament to Burgan's commitment to deliver on its strategic pillars.

Daher concluded by stating that, "The key priority for Burgan now is to deliver on its envisioned operating model for UGB, which would be focused on generating onshore client revenues and serving clients in Bahrain, as well as supporting the Bank's existing clientele through enhanced product and services offerings."

## Companies slam delay on deep sea mining rules

UNITED NATIONS: Firms investing heavily to explore the seabed for valuable minerals have criticized long delays in crafting deep-sea mining rules, urging an international oceans watchdog in a letter this week to pass regulations this year.

Under the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, the International Seabed Authority (ISA), based in Jamaica, is responsible for both protecting the seabed in areas beyond national jurisdictions and for overseeing any exploration or exploitation of coveted mineral resources in those zones.

The ISA's Council, which for now only grants exploration contracts, has been drawing up commercial exploitation rules for more than a decade.

Since July 2023, due to a legal clause invoked by the tiny Pacific island nation of Nauru, and despite the lack of rules, any country can apply for a mining contract on behalf of a company it sponsors.

The Council is aiming to adopt a mining code this year that would end the legal vacuum, establishing rules for scraping the ocean floor for minerals like nickel, cobalt and copper, which, according to some companies, are crucial for a global transition to renewable energy.

But "there are no guarantees that the Exploitation Regulations will be adopted in 2025, placing contractors (companies with exploration contracts) in an increasingly difficult position," wrote eight firms in a letter to the ISA Council this week which was obtained by AFP on Friday.

The companies include Nauru Ocean Resources Inc, a subsidiary of Canada's The Metals Company (TMC), which expects to file its first exploitation application in June.

"With this letter, we wish to express our concerns regarding the delay in the transition to the exploitation phase," the firms wrote, calling on the Council to finalize regulations in 2025.

They said they have made investments based on "legitimate expectations" that relied on the legal framework of the ISA, which provides for a transition from exploration to exploitation rules.

The firms said their collective investments amounted to around \$2 billion for the exploration of deep-sea mineral resources, the acquisition of environmental data, and the development of mining and processing technologies. The "prolonged delay" in adopting the mining code and the "potential willingness of the ISA, including some of its member States, to not comply with this Legal Framework and fulfill those expectations is deeply concerning," the companies said.

Without mining regulations, the firms "face escalating legal and financial risks that were not foreseen or expected at the time we made our investments," the letter says, denouncing the "unfair burden."

About 30 countries, of the 169 ISA member states, have called for a moratorium on deep-sea mining, with NGOs and scientists warning of the potential risks posed by the activity to little understood undersea ecosystems. — AFP

## Trump, Xi hold call on TikTok, trade, Taiwan

WASHINGTON: US President-elect Donald Trump and Chinese President Xi Jinping discussed issues including TikTok, trade and Taiwan in a phone call on Friday, just days before Trump takes office again promising tariffs that could ratchet up tensions between the world's two biggest economies.

Both leaders were upbeat about the call, with Trump calling it "a very good one" and Xi saying he and Trump both hoped for a positive start to US-China relations, according to Chinese state broadcaster CCTV. It was the first known phone call between the pair after Trump's election in November.

The US and China are embroiled in an array of diplomatic and economic disagreements, including an accelerating technological and military rivalry and bitter trade disputes. Marco Rubio, Trump's nominee to be his secretary of state, has defined China as the gravest threat facing the US and warned about the risks of possible military conflict between the two countries. The call came shortly before US Supreme Court on Friday announced a ruling upholding a law that mandates TikTok owner ByteDance divest TikTok's US assets by Sunday to a non-Chinese buyer, or be banned on national security concerns.

"The call was a very good one for both China and the USA. It is my expectation that we will solve many problems together, and starting immediately. We discussed balancing Trade, Fentanyl, TikTok, and many



Xi Jinping



Donald Trump

other subjects," Trump wrote on his social media platform. "President Xi and I will do everything possible to make the World more peaceful and safe!" Xi raised China's concerns about Taiwan, which Beijing maintains is part of its territory, and said he hoped the US would treat the matter with great care.

"The Taiwan issue concerns China's national sovereignty and territorial integrity, and he hopes the US side will handle it with caution," he said according to Chinese state television. Xi said the United States and China can have their differences but must respect each other's core interests, and that trade relations can be mutually beneficial without confrontation and conflict, comments similar to those he made during Trump's first term.

The Chinese readout of the call said the two leaders agreed to set up a "channel of strategic communication to keep in regular touch on major issues of shared interest." Trump offered strong support to Taiwan, including regularizing arms sales, in his first term. But during the campaign last year, he said Tai-

wan should pay the US to be defended. The Republican president-elect, who upended trade relations in his first term, is about to embark on an even more aggressive effort in his second term. He has pledged to impose an additional 10 percent tariff on Chinese goods unless Beijing does more to stop trafficking of the highly addictive narcotic fentanyl, and he threatened tariffs in excess of 60 percent on Chinese goods while on the campaign trail.

Trump said on Jan 6 that he and Xi have been communicating through representatives, expressing optimism about their relationship. Zack Cooper, a senior fellow at the American Enterprise Institute think tank, said whether Trump in coming days would permit TikTok to operate without a qualified divestment and whether he applied tariffs on China quickly or first began negotiations with Beijing would be early indicators of how confrontational his stance toward China would be.

Trump posted online later that his decision on TikTok would be coming soon, and that "everyone must respect" the Supreme Court ruling. Breaking with tradition, Trump had invited Xi and other foreign leaders to his Jan 20 inauguration, but China is sending Vice President Han Zheng, a move signaling Beijing's desire to step up communication with the incoming administration. Still, any "grand bargain" between the two sides over trade, Taiwan and other strategic issues would be difficult to reach, said Scott Kennedy, a China expert at the Center for Strategic and International Studies think tank in Washington. "There's an immense amount of distance between what one can imagine and actually achieving such an outcome. The interests between the US and China on many of these issues are different and the views of key advisors to both are quite hawkish," Kennedy said. — Reuters

## China's economic growth among slowest in decades

BEIJING: China posted one of its slowest rates of economic growth in decades Friday, as leaders nervously eye a potential trade standoff with incoming US president Donald Trump. Beijing has announced in recent months its most aggressive support measures in years in a bid to reignite an economy suffering on multiple fronts, including a prolonged property market debt crisis and sluggish consumer spending.

However, calls for even further policy help came after official figures showed the Chinese economy grew five percent in 2024. While the reading from Beijing's National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) was slightly above the 4.9 percent forecast in an AFP survey of analysts, it was still short of the 5.2 percent increase recorded in 2023. The growth took place in the face of a "complicated and severe environment with increasing external pressures and internal difficulties", the NBS said. Retail sales, a key gauge of consumer sentiment, rose 3.5 percent—a major slump from the 7.2 percent growth seen in 2023 -- although industrial output increased 5.8 percent from 4.6 percent the previous year.

However, the 5.4 percent jump in economic growth seen in the final four months far outpaced the five percent forecast in a Bloomberg survey and was much better than the same period in 2023.

The data provided "mixed messages", said Zhiwei Zhang, president of Pinpoint

Asset Management. Beijing's recent policy shift had "helped the economy to stabilize in (the fourth quarter), but it requires large and persistent policy stimulus to boost economic momentum and sustain the recovery", he said.

Zichun Huang, China economist at Capital Economics, said she expected growth to "continue accelerating in the coming months". "The government's property support measures seem to be providing some relief, with the pace of house price falls slowing and new home sales showing some recovery," she said.

The GDP growth rate is the lowest recorded by China since 1990, excluding the financially tumultuous years of the COVID-19 pandemic. Analysts surveyed by AFP estimated growth could fall to 4.4 percent in 2025, and even drop below four percent the following year.

China has so far failed to rebound from the pandemic, with domestic spending mired in a slump and indebted local governments dragging on growth. In a rare bright spot, official data this week showed that exports reached a historic high last year. But gathering storm clouds over China's massive trade surplus mean Beijing may not be able to count on overseas shipments to boost an otherwise lacklustre economy.

Trump, who will begin his second term next week, has promised to unleash heavy trade sanctions on China. NBS data also showed on Friday that output from thermal plants—fuelled



NANJING: A customer walks with a trolley at a supermarket in Nanjing, east China's Jiangsu province on January 17, 2025. — AFP

primarily by coal—increased 1.5 percent year-on-year in 2024.

China's production of fossil fuels, including coal and natural gas also jumped, the data showed, casting doubt on hopes that the country's emissions began to decline last year. Beijing has introduced a series of measures in recent months to bolster the economy, including cutting key interest rates, easing local government debt and expanding subsidy programs for household goods.

Observers were closely watching Friday's data release for signs those measures had succeeded in reviving activity. China's central bank has hinted that it will cut rates further in 2025, part of a key shift characterized by a "moderately loose" monetary policy stance.

However, analysts warn more efforts

are needed to boost domestic consumption as the outlook for Chinese exports becomes more uncertain. "Monetary policy support alone is unlikely to right the economy," Harry Murphy Cruise of Moody's Analytics told AFP.

"China is suffering from a crisis of confidence, not one of credit," he wrote. Ting Lu, Chief China Economist at Nomura, wrote that Beijing, "encouraged" by its achievement of last year's goal, was unlikely to change its annual growth goal of around five percent for the year ahead. "We are concerned that Beijing may not ramp up its efforts enough in carrying out the hard work after seeing some short-term green shoots," Lu wrote. "Despite today's sanguine data, now is not the time for Beijing to rest on its laurels." — AFP

## China: Population fell for third year in a row in 2024

BEIJING: China said on Friday its population fell for the third year running in 2024, extending a downward streak after more than six decades of growth as the country faces a rapidly ageing population and persistently low birth rates.

Once the world's most populous country, China was overtaken by India in 2023, with Beijing seeking to boost falling birth rates through subsidies and pro-fertility propaganda. The population stood at 1.408 billion by the end of the year, Beijing's National Bureau of Statistics said, down from 1.410 billion in 2023. The decline was less sharp than the previous

year, when it was more than double the fall reported for 2022, data showed.

China ended its strict "one-child policy", imposed in the 1980s over overpopulation fears, in 2016 and started letting couples have three children in 2021.

But that has failed to reverse the demographic decline for a country that has long relied on its vast workforce as a driver of economic growth. Many say falling birth rates are due to the soaring cost of living, as well as the growing number of women going into the workforce and seeking higher education. Population decline is likely to continue due to gloomy economic prospects for young people and as Chinese women "confront entrenched labor market gender discriminations", Yun Zhou, a sociologist at the University of Michigan, told AFP.

People over 60 are expected to make up nearly a third of China's population by 2035, according to the Economist Intelligence Unit, a research group.

Data released on Friday showed that the popu-



FUYANG: This photo taken on January 16, 2025 shows children taking a ride with adults in a park in Fuyang, east China's Anhui province. — AFP

lation aged 60 and over reached 310.31 million—just a few percentage points short of a quarter of the country and an increase from nearly 297 million recorded in 2023. However, the data also showed China's birth rate—among the lowest in the world—ticked up slightly from the previous

year to 6.77 per 1,000 people.

"This uptick is unlikely to last, as the population of childbearing-age women is projected to decline sharply in the coming decades," said Zhao Litao, a senior research fellow at the National University of Singapore's East Asian Institute. "In the long term, the trends of declining births, overall population contraction, and rapid ageing remain unchanged." He Yafu, an independent demographer in China, put the uptick in births down to women who deferred having children during the COVID-19 pandemic giving birth. There was also an increase in marriages in 2023 and 2024, the auspicious Year of the Dragon.

However, "the general trend of total population decline won't change", he told AFP. "Unless strong policies to encourage childbirth are introduced... the proportion of the elderly population will continue to rise." Officials said in September they would gradually raise the statutory retirement age, which was set at 60 and among the lowest in the world. — AFP

## Business

# IMF raises global growth outlook, flags rising economic divergence

## OPEC+ oil cuts to have impact on Middle East growth

WASHINGTON: Global growth is expected to increase slightly this year while remaining stuck below its pre-pandemic average, the IMF said Friday, flagging the growing economic divide between the United States and European countries. In an update to its flagship World Economic Outlook report, the International Monetary Fund said it expects global growth to hit 3.3 percent this year, up 0.1 percentage point from its previous forecast in October, and to remain at 3.3 percent in 2026.

"Growth is steady," IMF chief economist Pierre-Olivier Gourinchas told AFP in an interview, adding that it remained below the average global growth rate in the first two decades of the 21st century of 3.7 percent.

The IMF expects the global inflation rate to continue decelerating, reaching 4.2 percent this year and 3.5 percent in 2026, with prices cooling faster in advanced economies than in emerging markets.

"Among advanced economies, the interesting development here is the strength and resilience and growth of the US economy," Gourinchas said, pointing to the IMF's decision to hike its outlook for US growth to 2.7 percent in 2025 and to 2.1 percent in 2026. "The labor market has been strong, there is strong demand, private demand is robust, there is good confidence," he said.

One of the risks to the IMF's forecasts is policy uncertainty in the United States, where Donald Trump is preparing to return to the White House. The IMF did not include the Republican president-elect's policy proposals in its forecasts and instead based its projections on existing US policies.

"The bottom line is, when we look at the risk for the US, we see an upside risk on inflation," he said.

The economic picture in the United States stands in stark contrast to the Euro area, where a sharp downgrade for Germany has dampened expectations for a rebound in growth.

The IMF now forecasts Euro area growth to increase slightly to 1.0 percent this year, and 1.4 percent in 2026, below its October forecasts. "Some of the divergence is structural," Gourinchas told reporters on Friday, noting the "persistently stronger" productivity growth in the United States than in Europe, especially in the technology sector. This, he added, was "linked to a favorable business environment and deeper capital markets."

The Fund left its outlook for growth in Japan unchanged this year and next, and slightly increased its outlook for the United Kingdom in 2025. In Russia, which is affected by the ongoing and costly war in Ukraine, the IMF expects growth to slow sharply from 3.8 percent in 2024 to 1.4 percent this year, and to 1.2 percent in 2026.

The IMF expects China's growth rate to continue cooling this year to 4.6 percent, up 0.1 percentage point from the October forecast, before easing to 4.5 percent next year.

The slight upgrade was due to the Chinese government's recently announced package of fiscal support to help prop up the slowing economy, which is struggling with a property market slump and uncertainty about trade policy once Donald Trump takes office next week. The slowdown in growth in the world's second-largest economy is leading to something of a "rebalancing" among emerging markets, Gourinchas said, with countries including India — which the IMF expects to grow by 6.5 percent this year and next — playing a more important role.



MONDULKIRI, Cambodia: Vendors prepare fruits for sale along a street at Krong Saen Monourom in Mondulakiri province on January 17, 2025. — AFP

Growth in the Middle East and Central Asia is expected to pick up by less than previously forecast due largely to the effect of oil production cuts by the OPEC+ group of oil-producing nations, which

includes Saudi Arabia. Economic activity is expected to rise more quickly in Latin America, the IMF said, adding that it also expected growth in sub-Saharan Africa to pick up this year. — AFP

## UK to delay Basel bank rules by a year, EU weighing options

LONDON: The Bank of England said on Friday it would delay tougher bank capital rules by a year to January 2027 to get clarity on what the United States will do under Donald Trump as president, prompting the European Union to say it would also weigh its options. The standards written by the global Basel Committee are the final set of international reforms designed to make the banking system safer after the 2008 global financial crisis, and are meant to be implemented by member jurisdictions.

The European Union — which currently plans to implement the reforms a year earlier from January 2026 — said it would consider its next steps, but said it was in "everyone's interest" to implement them fully and on time. "(The EU) is now considering which steps to take on this in light of developments in other jurisdictions, including the US and the UK," a European Commission spokesperson said.

An EU official, who declined to be named, expressed surprise and disappointment at the BoE's delay, given its long-standing insistence on high standards, but said it raised level playing field issues that needed to be considered. John Cronin, a financials industry analyst at SeaPoint Insights, said: "While EU policymakers have been holding a firm line... the competitive position of the EU banking sector overshadows ideals — and the EU will, in my view, follow the US and UK's lead."

The reforms have faced fierce opposition from US banks, and analysts have said they could be watered down or scrapped under Donald Trump's incoming administration, after the departure of top banking regulator Michael Barr. Britain's Labour government has been pressuring British regulators to do more to promote growth, with finance minister Rachel Reeves reiterating on Thursday that watchdogs had a key role to play.

Shares in British banks made modest gains after the BoE announcement, with Barclays BARC.L up 1.8 percent, Lloyds up 1.5 percent and HSBC up 0.7 percent, compared to a 1.3 percent gain for the wider FTSE 100 index. Gary Greenwood, an analyst at Shore Capital, said bank share reactions were likely to be muted as the BoE had played down the potential impact of the reforms on bank capital requirements.

The BoE's statement was published by its regulatory arm, the Prudential Regulation Authority (PRA), having made the decision in consultation with Britain's Treasury. The PRA said it had taken into account competitiveness and growth considerations. Implementation of the reforms in Britain had previously been delayed last summer by about six months to January 2026. — Reuters

## Trump's economic plans could cause inflation: IMF official

WASHINGTON: Donald Trump's economic plans risk reigniting US inflation, International Monetary Fund (IMF) chief economist Pierre-Olivier Gourinchas told AFP, a few days before the president-elect returns to the White House. Trump's proposals to hike tariffs and curtail immigration would likely constrain the supply side of the economy and push up prices, Gourinchas said in an interview. Other

## US TikTok ban looms as Trump seeks last-ditch solution

WASHINGTON: TikTok says it will "go dark" in the United States on Sunday, threatening access to the app for 170 million users, unless the government provides assurances that a law mandating its sale or ban won't be used to punish service providers.

After months of legal tussles, the US Supreme Court on Friday upheld a law that would ban the popular video-sharing platform in the name of national security, unless its Chinese owners reach an 11th-hour deal to sell it to non-Chinese buyers by Sunday. Only months after overwhelmingly backing the law, lawmakers and officials were now fretting about the ban, with all eyes on whether US President-elect Donald Trump can swoop in and find a way to save the app.

From teenage dancers to grandmothers sharing cooking tips, TikTok has been embraced for its ability to transform ordinary users into global celebrities when a video goes viral.

It is also appreciated by Trump, who has credited the app with connecting him to younger voters, contributing to his election victory in November. Trump discussed TikTok with Chinese President Xi Jinping on Friday and said he would need more time to find a solution.

"My decision on TikTok will be made in the not too distant future, but I must have time to review the

## UK's Reeves vows to keep taking difficult decisions

LONDON: Britain's Finance Minister Rachel Reeves said she was tuning out her critics and would continue making difficult decisions in an effort to grow the economy, speaking after a bruising week in which opponents called for her to quit. Concerns about Britain's slow economy contributed to a surge in its government borrowing costs, while businesses have warned big increases on social security contributions paid by employers, introduced by Reeves, will further dampen growth.

Reeves insisted her decisions were correct and said they had been made in the national interest to put public finances back on "a firm footing". Her job, she told the BBC's Political Thinking podcast, required "steely determination". "I'm happy to be the iron chancellor if that's what you want to call me," she added, in a nod to Margaret Thatcher, the Conservative former British prime minister whose uncompromising style earned her the nickname the "Iron Lady". Reeves said she would not let her critics get her down.

"I'm not going to let them (stop) me from doing what this government's got a mandate to do, and that's to grow the economy, to make working people better off,"

proposals the president-elect has floated, such as cutting red tape and taxes, could also fuel inflation by boosting demand, he added. "The bottom line is, when we look at the risk for the US, we see an upside risk on inflation," he said.

Gourinchas spoke to AFP at the IMF's headquarters in Washington, a day before the publication of its key World Economic Outlook (WEO) report on Friday. In the WEO update, which did not account for Trump's proposals due to policy "uncertainty," the IMF raised its forecast for global growth and sharply hiked its outlook for the US economy.

Many economists see Trump's tariff and immigration plans as inflationary, but Trump and his advisors have pushed back, arguing that the

situation. Stay tuned!" Trump said in a social media post. Late on Friday, however, TikTok said its US services would "go dark" unless the Biden administration "immediately provides a definitive statement to satisfy the most critical service providers assuring non-enforcement" of the law calling for the platform's ban. The administration of outgoing President Joe Biden, who leaves office on Monday, has said it will leave the matter to Trump's incoming government.

After the court defeat, TikTok CEO Shou Chew appealed to Trump, thanking him for his "commitment to work with us to find a solution."

Trump "truly understands our platform," he added. TikTok has been lobbying furiously to thwart the law's implementation, with Chew set to attend Trump's inauguration on Monday.

The law requires Apple and Google to remove TikTok from their app stores, blocking new downloads. The companies could face penalties of up to \$5,000 per user who can access the app. Oracle, which hosts TikTok's servers, would also be under legal obligation to enforce the ban.

None of the companies responded to requests for comment. The law allows a 90-day delay if the White House can show progress toward a viable deal, but TikTok owner ByteDance has flatly refused any sale. Frank McCourt, the former Los Angeles Dodgers owner, has made an offer to purchase TikTok's US activity and said he's "ready to work with the company and President Trump to complete a deal."

Canadian investor Kevin O'Leary, who is involved in that offer, told Fox News that ByteDance was offered \$20 billion for TikTok's US operation. He acknowledged the legal uncertainty over the case, with

she said. Britain's economic output returned to growth in November, the first month after finance minister Rachel Reeves announced big tax increases for businesses, but the expansion was smaller than expected.

Gross domestic product rose by 0.1 percent from October, according to official data, after falls in September and October. However, economists polled by Reuters had mostly forecast a 0.2 percent rise. Reeves, whose Oct. 30 budget included big increases in social security contributions paid by employers, said she was "determined to go further and faster to kick-start economic growth."

She will meet regulators on Thursday to discuss what they can do to help the Labour government meet its promise to speed up the economy. Ben Jones, lead economist at the Confederation of British Industry, said a mood of caution had settled over UK businesses since the budget.

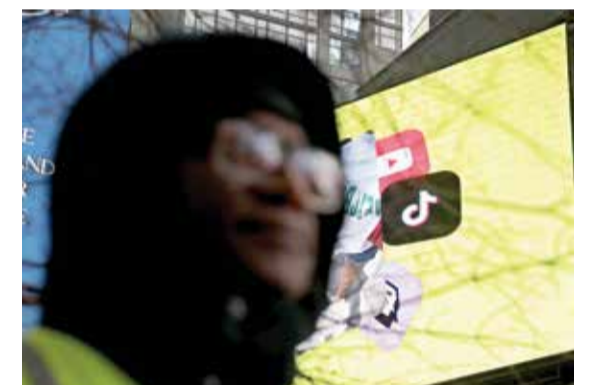
"Many firms are entering 2025 with a focus on reducing operational expenditure, which is likely to weigh on pay, hiring and investment in the months ahead," Jones said. Rob Wood, chief UK economist at Pantheon Macroeconomics, said Thursday's data showed the gloomy mood continued for the UK economy due to the budget tax hikes and global uncertainty after Donald Trump's US presidential election victory. The Bank of England looked certain to cut rates in February, Wood said, "but we think the outlook remains brighter than the late 2024 data suggest, and talk of recessionary risk is wide of the mark."

Sterling fell, dropping by about a fifth of a cent

overall package of measures he plans to enact should help keep prices in check. Traders have pared back the number of rate cuts they expect the US Federal Reserve to make in 2025, assigning a roughly 80 percent chance that it will make no more than two quarter-point cuts this year, according to data from CME Group.

Gourinchas said the IMF expects the Fed to cut rates by half a percentage point in both 2025 and 2026, a forecast in line with the median projection of Fed officials surveyed in December.

In the world's second-largest economy, which is grappling with a crisis in the property sector and growing uncertainty about global trade policy, the situation looks starkly different. In its WEO report, the IMF forecasts that China's growth will continue



NEW YORK: The TikTok logo is displayed on a billboard at Times Square in New York City on January 17, 2025. — AFP

it remaining an open question whether an executive order by Trump to halt the ban would override the law. "Congress wrote this law to be virtually president-proof," warned Adam Kovacevich, chief executive of industry trade group Chamber of Progress.

Sarah Kreps, professor of government and law at Cornell University, said, "If an executive order conflicts with an existing law, the law takes precedence, and the order can be struck down by the courts." If TikTok is forced into a shutdown, its US-based rivals Instagram Reels and YouTube Shorts would benefit. Thousands of worried TikTok users have protectively turned to Xiaohongshu ("Little Red Book"), a Chinese social media network similar to Instagram.

Nicknamed "Red Note" by its American users, it was the most downloaded app on the US Apple Store this week. — AFP



BEIJING: British Treasury chief Rachel Reeves listens during the 11th China-UK Economy and Finance Dialogue in Beijing. — AFP

against the US dollar before recovering some of that loss. The Office for National Statistics said the services sector grew a little in November with wholesaling, pubs and restaurants and IT companies all doing well but manufacturers and oil and gas firms had a weaker month.

Britain's economy, which was slow to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic, showed zero growth in the third quarter when uncertainty about the upcoming budget hit businesses. The BoE expects economic growth to have flat-lined in the last three months of 2024. However, an increase in government spending is expected to give a short-term boost to growth in 2025. — Reuters

to cool, but on a slightly shallower path thanks to the government's recent package of fiscal support designed to support the slowing economy.

"If you look at China, the concerns are with maybe entering a deflation regime, having the property sector crisis become worse," Gourinchas said. "In terms of policies, we certainly think that the Chinese are going in the right direction, but maybe the Chinese authorities can do more," he said.

If they do not, China runs the risk that the recent economic support proves insufficient, potentially leading to a larger slowdown in growth, he added. Data from Beijing published Friday showed that China's growth hit five percent last year, slightly above expectations but short of the 5.2 percent increase recorded in 2023. — AFP



New visual identity.



A start towards the future.

# KFH unveils a new visual identity... Beyond Horizons

## Maintaining growth and commitment to innovation in the digital era

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait Finance House (KFH) has unveiled a new visual identity to align with its growth, significant achievements, and expanding global presence. The rebranding also reflects KFH's aspirations and reinforces its dedication to embracing technology, progress, and innovation in the digital era, solidifying its position as a leader in Islamic banking.

The new visual identity was unveiled at a grand ceremony held at the Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Cultural Centre. This special event was attended by Chairman Hamad Abdulmohsen Al-Marzouq and Board members, Group Chief Executive Officer Khaled Yousef Al-Shamlan along with other members of KFH executive management and employees.

KFH Chairman Hamad Abdulmohsen Al-Marzouq said: "We are delighted to announce the dawn of a new chapter for Kuwait Finance House, characterized by a distinct experience and an exceptional vision for the future. This phase marks a transformative milestone in our journey, signified by the launch of our new visual identity. This identity embodies the future and reflects the Group's leading position in digital excellence, innovation, and global leadership in the development of Islamic financial services."



Hamad Abdulmohsen Al-Marzouq

This phase marks a transformative milestone, embodies the future, and reflects the Group's leadership



Khaled Yousef Al-Shamlan

The launch of the new visual identity aligns with KFH's growth, leadership, and extensive global reach

tion of approximately KD 13 billion. Furthermore, KFH has emerged as the world's second-largest Islamic bank, achieving significant milestones and reaping substantial benefits across all areas of the institution. This has positively impacted our valued customers and shareholders."

Al-Marzouq pointed out that KFH Group boasts a substantial financial network encompassing 12 countries worldwide. Among the most prominent of these are Kuwait, Bahrain, Turkey, Egypt, the United Kingdom, and Germany. KFH's global presence confirms its standing as a global leader of Islamic banking services.

wait Finance House, the Group's banks and subsidiaries, marking the beginning of a new chapter and a launch toward the future. This milestone reinforces our excellence in the various aspects of banking, innovative financial solutions, and pioneering financial technology. It will directly reflect on performance levels and work methodologies, enhancing the banking experience to align with our new identity."

Al-Shamlan added that the launch of the new visual identity aligns with KFH's growth, leadership, and extensive global reach. It also underscores the bank's com-

mitment to digital transformation, sustainability, and innovation, while emphasizing its dedication to enhancing customer experience and providing innovative banking solutions. He explained: "During the rebranding process of KFH, we were keen to maintain our legacy and Islamic heritage while reflecting our commitment to excellence in the Islamic banking industry, in accordance with the highest global standards of technology and innovation."

tegitic shift towards achieving our forward-thinking plans. At KFH, we take pride in our unprecedented success and leadership throughout decades, reaching a remarkable position as the largest bank in Kuwait in terms of market cap and the second-largest Islamic bank in the world. We will continue our efforts to sustain our leading position and fulfill the aspirations of our shareholders and customers, our core priority. We continue to play a significant role in advancing the future of Islamic finance. We remain a distinctive, credible, and reliable brand renowned for high financial solvency, consistent prof-

### The new visual identity

The rebranding process necessitated concerted efforts, encompassing extensive research and gathering feedback from customers, employees, and design experts. The objective was to create a logo that authentically reflected the brand's identity and its vision for the future.

### Symbol

The redesigned symbol reflects our global reach, digital focus, and innovative spirit. It embodies KFH's commitment to providing cutting-edge banking solutions while remaining grounded in cultural heritage and Islamic values.

### Lettering

The bold, clean lines of KFH's new custom font symbolize solidity, reliability, and stability, blending tradition with modernity.

### Employees

It opens new opportunities for growth, innovation, and collaboration within a forward-thinking, value-driven environment. It enhances the sense of pride in working for a trusted, international brand that is committed to integrity and Islamic banking principles.

### Customers

The rebranding signifies KFH's continued commitment to providing modern, innovative, and accessible financial solutions, ensuring access to world-class services, enhanced digital tools, and a broader range of offerings and empowering customers to achieve their financial goals with a trusted, future-focused partner.



Thamer Al-Baz



Salma Al-Ayoubi



Master of Ceremonies Abdullah Al-Saif



Ali Al-Mulla

He added: "Last year, by the grace of Allah, we accomplished a historic mission. We achieved a significant milestone by successfully implementing the first and largest merger project in the Kuwaiti banking sector. This merger was part of the strategic acquisition of Ahli United Group – Bahrain, the largest such deal in the region. Following the acquisition, KFH has become the largest bank in Kuwait by market capitalization and the largest Kuwaiti private sector company listed on Boursa Kuwait, with a market capitaliza-

tion of approximately KD 13 billion. Furthermore, KFH has emerged as the world's second-largest Islamic bank, achieving significant milestones and reaping substantial benefits across all areas of the institution. This has positively impacted our valued customers and shareholders."

Al-Marzouq expressed his gratitude to all who contributed to shaping this new identity for KFH, wishing everyone success.

**KFH Group CEO Khaled Al-Shamlan**  
KFH Group Chief Executive Officer Khaled Yousef Al-Shamlan said: "Today, we unveil the new visual identity of Ku-

wait Finance House, the Group's banks and subsidiaries, marking the beginning of a new chapter and a launch toward the future. This milestone reinforces our excellence in the various aspects of banking, innovative financial solutions, and pioneering financial technology. It will directly reflect on performance levels and work methodologies, enhancing the banking experience to align with our new identity."

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Al-Shamlan said: "Today, we begin a new chapter in our journey and a stra-



Haitham Al-Terkait, Khaled Al-Shamlan, Hamad Al-Marzouq, Abdulaziz Al-Nafisi, Khaled Al-Nisf and Dalal Al-Nouri



Haitham Al-Terkait, Khaled Al-Shamlan, Hamad Al-Marzouq, Abdulaziz Al-Nafisi, Khaled Al-Nisf, Dalal Al-Nouri, Moaz Al-Asimi, Nasser Al-Roudhan, Ahmed Al-Hamad, and Ahmed Al-Sumait



Khaled Al-Nisf and Moaz Al-Asimi



Dalal Al-Nouri, Moaz Al-Asimi, Nasser Al-Roudhan, Ahmed Al-Fares, Ahmed Al-Sumait and Fawaz Al-Anizi



Khaled Al-Shamlan, Hamad Al-Marzouq, Abdulaziz Yacoub Al-Nafisi, and Khalid Salem Al-Nisf

# Lifestyle

SUNDAY, JANUARY 19, 2025



## MILAN'S MEN'S FASHION WEEK BRAVES CRISIS IN LUXURY

DOLCE & GABBANA



Dolce & Gabbana, Prada and Giorgio Armani lead a reduced schedule for men's fashion week that opened Friday in Milan, putting a brave face on a crisis in the luxury sector. Fendi and Gucci are noticeably absent, having shown here last January but this season having opted to show mixed collections during women's fashion week in Milan in February. But among the 16 live shows and dozens of other events over the next five days, down from 22 live shows last January, are still some of Italian fashion's biggest names - and some newcomers.

French designer Pierre-Louis Mascia kicked off proceedings Friday with a mixed men and women's collection for autumn/winter 2025. The former fashion illustrator, who uses collage to create complex pat-

terns printed onto fabric, staged his well-received first catwalk show last summer at the Pitti Uomo trade show in Florence. He has described his style as "Hermes with a funkier side".

It is a tough time to be entering the industry, with Italian menswear sales falling 3.6 percent to 11.4 billion euros (\$11.7 billion) in 2024. They had grown by 4.7 percent in 2023 and 20.3 percent in 2022, after the coronavirus pandemic. According to estimates from the Italian Fashion Chamber, the entire sector, including womenswear, ended the year with turnover down 5.3 percent, to 95.9 billion euros.

Luxury goods in general have been hit by weak domestic consumption in China, although geopolitical tensions and rising prices also play a factor. "Mainly this depends on Chi-

nese consumers and their crisis of confidence," Luca Solca, an analyst at Bernstein, told AFP. "The collapse of the real estate market is making them feel poorer, reducing their desire to spend."

Solca said fashion shows helped the industry by getting people talking about brands, particularly on social media. "They are a springboard which influencers can use to post comments," he added. For Carlo Capasa, president of the Italian Fashion Chamber, the antidote to the crisis is creativity. "We must continue to create dreams to restart consumption," he said. "More than ever in times of crisis, we need to invest in creativity, which is our most important driver." - AFP



PHILIPP PLEIN



PIERRE-LOUIS MASCIA



## Lifestyle

## UK film, theatre legend Joan Plowright dies aged 95

Oscar-nominated English actor Joan Plowright, acknowledged as one of the leading actors of her generation, has died at the age of 95, her family said on Friday. A star first in theatre and later on screen, Plowright was also the wife of the great actor Laurence Olivier. "It is with great sadness that the family of Dame Joan Plowright, the Lady Olivier, inform you that she passed away peacefully on 16 January 2025 surrounded by her family at Denville Hall at the glorious age of 95.

"Her brilliant career will be remembered by many, her wonderful being always cherished by her children Richard, Tamsin and Julie-Kate, their families and Joan's many friends," they added. Plowright's career was largely played out in the theatre, often opposite her husband, but following his death in 1989 she began to find more roles on screen. Her later film and television work introduced her to new generations, with two films in particular that took her to Italy.

In the 1991 film "Enchanted April", set in the 1920s, she played the acid-tongued Mrs Fisher, for which she missed out on an Oscar to Marisa Tomei. The other film that took her to Italy was Franco Zeffirelli's 1999 film "Tea with Mussolini", set in Florence in



Actress Joan Plowright poses for a picture after being made a Dame by the Prince of Wales at Buckingham Palace in London, February 20, 2004.--AFP photos

1935, in which she teamed up with two other dames of the English stage, Maggie Smith and Judi Dench.

## Multiple awards

In 1993, she became one of the few actors to have won two Golden Globes in the same year, one for "Enchanted April" and the other for the HBO TV series "Stalin". She also appeared in films

that attracted a younger audience such as "Dennis the Menace", "Last Action Hero" and "101 Dalmatians". Plowright won a Tony for her performance in "A Taste of Honey" in 1961 but then began to adjust her career to accommodate her husband as he directed the Chichester Festival Theatre and then launched the National Theatre. This included performing alongside Olivier



Sir Laurence Olivier and English actress Joan Plowright play in a scene of his film "The Entertainer", in 1960.

-- on stage she received plaudits for her Sonya to Olivier's Uncle Vanya -- although she also took time off completely to have three children.

Plowright suffered macular degeneration which gradually caused her to lose her sight, leading her to retire from acting in 2014. "It is a wrench," she admitted at the time. "But it is (a decision) that everybody has to make some time

in their life and when you have had a very good life and been lucky, which I have, well you say 'it's my turn now'." The Olivier Awards, named after her husband, on Friday announced that theatre lights in London's West End would be dimmed for two minutes in her memory next Tuesday evening. — AFP



This combination of pictures shows US actor Jon Voight, US actor and filmmaker Mel Gibson and US actor Sylvester Stallone.--AFP

## Trump names trio of divisive stars as Hollywood 'ambassadors'

US President-elect Donald Trump named controversial movie legends and long-standing supporters Sylvester Stallone, Mel Gibson and Jon Voight as special envoys to Hollywood in a bid to make the entertainment industry "stronger than ever before." The trio of stars, who have 10 Oscar nominations between them and three wins, stand out in Tinseltown, breaking ranks with the bulk of their colleagues who have long leaned to the Democrats.

But all three are as famous for their personal lives as their politics and two -- like Trump -- have been in very serious scrapes with law enforcement. "It is my honor to announce Jon Voight, Mel Gibson, and Sylvester Stallone, to be Special Ambassadors to a great but very troubled place, Hollywood, California," Trump wrote on his Truth Social platform.

"They will serve as Special Envoys to me for the purpose of bringing Hollywood, which has lost much business over the last four years to Foreign Countries, BACK -- BIGGER, BETTER, AND STRONGER THAN EVER BEFORE!" Jon Voight made headlines in 2020 when fellow actor Frank Whaley accused the star of slapping him while they worked on the crime drama Ray Donovan -- but his controversies have otherwise mainly been tied to his support of Trump.

Gibson, on the other hand, has been plagued by accusations of anti-Semitism, homophobia, racism and domestic violence. He has been on a comeback since being shut out from Hollywood after his 2006 Malibu drunk-driving arrest

during which he went on an anti-Jewish rant. The scandal was followed by leaked tapes in 2010 where Gibson used racist slurs against the mother of one of his nine children, Oksana Grigorieva, who later alleged that he was physically abusive.

Stallone -- who recently called Trump the "second George Washington" -- has faced a string of sexual assault allegations, all of which he has denied. In 2018, the Los Angeles County District Attorney's office said there was not enough evidence to prosecute the star over allegations that he sexually assaulted a woman in 1987 and 1990.

In 2007, Stallone admitted importing 48 vials of banned human growth hormone into Australia. He said he was taking them under doctor's orders and had not intended to break the law. "These three very talented people will be my eyes and ears, and I will get done what they suggest. It will again be, like The United States of America itself, The Golden Age of Hollywood!" added Trump, who has 34 felony convictions of his own.

Trump and the Republicans have traditionally received scant support from the entertainment industry, and a galaxy of stars from Taylor Swift to George Clooney backed Democrat Kamala Harris in the 2024 presidential election. Underlining the limited impact of star endorsements, Trump sidestepped Hollywood by tapping into a targeted subset of well-known, hypermasculine YouTube influencers.--AFP

## 'Conclave' and 'Emilia Perez' top nominations for BAFTA

"Conclave" and "Emilia Perez" led the shortlist of films battling for recognition at Britain's BAFTA awards, as the race for Oscars glory gathers pace. "Conclave", a fictionalized account of high-stakes horse-trading in the Vatican after the death of a pope, earned 12 nominations while surreal narco-thriller musical "Emilia Perez" followed close behind with 11. Both will compete for the coveted best film award at next month's ceremony, alongside Cannes favorite "Anora", Bob Dylan biopic "A Complete Unknown" and epic immigrant drama "The Brutalist", which notched up nine nominations.

Hit musical "Wicked", which last week topped the nominations for the influential Screen Actors Guild Awards, and "Dune: Part Two" were the other leading BAFTA contenders, with seven nods each. Unexpected hit "Kneecap", a docu-fiction about three Belfast upstarts who rap in the Irish language, racked up six nominations, including for original screenplay, outstanding British film and casting.

It has been longlisted for two Oscars, with the announcement of the final Academy Awards nominations delayed for a second time to January 23 due to the devastating wildfires gripping Los Angeles. This year's awards season is seen as highly unpredictable, with an international crop of movies all considered plausible

contenders for success on Hollywood's biggest night on March 2. The BAFTAs, the highlight of the annual British film calendar, will this year be held two weeks earlier, on February 16, at London's Royal Festival Hall and hosted by Scottish actor David Tennant.

## Array of contenders

"I'm really excited that we don't just have what's typically considered an award film... we got horror, we got sci-fi, we got musicals!" BAFTA film committee chair Anna Higgs told reporters. "It's a more open award race this year and that is really exciting." French director Jacques Audiard's Mexico-set "Emilia Perez" and "The Brutalist" will be strong contenders after both were the big winners at the Golden Globes earlier this month.

The director award pits Audiard against Edward Berger ("Conclave"), Sean Baker ("Anora"), Brady Corbet ("The Brutalist") Denis Villeneuve ("Dune: Part Two") and Coralie Fargeat ("The Substance"). German-born Berger claimed a BAFTA two years ago with his adaptation of "All Quiet on the Western Front", while France's Fargeat is the only woman nominated in the directing category. — AFP



(From left) English actor Mia McKenna-Bruce, BAFTA Chair Sara Putt, BAFTA Chair of Film Anna Higgs, English actor Will Sharpe, BAFTA CEO Jane Millichip, and BAFTA Executive Director of Awards & Content Emma Baehr pose for a picture at the announcement of the British Academy Film Awards (BAFTA) nominations in central London on January 15, 2025.



This combination of pictures shows Rapper Drake and recording artist Kendrick Lamar. — AFP

## Drake files defamation suit against Universal over Kendrick Lamar track

Rapper Drake filed suit against his own label, saying Universal Music Group's release and promotion of a Kendrick Lamar track dissing him amounted to defamation and harassment. UMG -- which is behind both Drake and Lamar -- adamantly denied the accusations, saying "the notion that we would seek to harm the reputation of any artist -- let alone Drake -- is illogical" given the company's longtime investment in helping him "achieve historic commercial and personal financial success."

Last year the two superstar rappers exchanged a litany of increasingly vitriolic diss tracks, with Lamar delivering the major blow with his chart-topping, Grammy-nominated song "Not Like Us." In his suit, Drake said Universal betrayed him in favor of profits by promoting the song with punchlines that accuse him of pedophilia.

In the documents filed in Manhattan's federal court and seen by AFP, Drake says Universal "approved, published, and launched a campaign to create a viral hit out of a rap track" that was "intended to convey the specific, unmistakable, and false factual allegation that Drake is a criminal pedophile, and to suggest that the public should resort to vigilante justice in response." The Canadian artist born Aubrey Drake Graham, 38, says the record company chose "corporate greed over the safety and well-being of its artists."

The lawsuit cited the track's promotion as causing a "physical threat to Drake's safety" as well as a "bombardment of online harassment." It cited a pre-dawn shooting last May that saw a gunman wound a security guard at the superstar rapper's estate in Toronto, and described subsequent break-in attempts. "These events were not coincidental," the suit said, before detailing the defamation allegations.

## 'Monetize allegations'

Drake -- the reigning highest-grossing rapper -- is not taking legal action against Lamar, and he is not suing over the lyrics themselves. "This lawsuit is not about the artist who created 'Not Like Us,'" read the court documents. "It is, instead, entirely about UMG, the music company that decided to publish, promote, exploit, and monetize allegations that it understood were not only false, but dangerous."

Drake's filing says Universal did so by promoting the song, but also the album image -- which Drake says features his actual house -- and a music video associated with the track. Universal's Wednesday statement vowed to "vigorously defend this litigation to protect our people and our reputation." "We have not and do not engage in defamation," said the company. — AFP

## Music industry girds for looming US TikTok ban

TikTok has dramatically changed music discovery and marketing -- a reliance the looming US ban on the popular app has underscored as the music world braces for an unknown future. That the short-form video-sharing app might shut down in the United States starting Sunday has fostered a sense of "marketing apocalypse" across the industry, says Tatiana Cirisano, a music industry analyst at MIDiA Research. For years TikTok has been an integral tool for most musicians, a jump-off point for artists looking to break out and an essential promotional platform for established musicians.

In an increasingly fragmented musical landscape, Cirisano says "Tik Tok served as sort of the one lightning rod where popularity could actually coalesce into a hit, and there actually could be these more mainstream cultural moments." Now, digital marketing companies say artists are scrambling to download and archive their TikTok content before the app goes dark -- the "worst-case scenario," said Cassie Petrey, founder of the digital marketing company Crowd Surf. "We've helped a

lot of talent build great audiences" on TikTok, Petrey said. "It is unfortunate."

## Life post-TikTok

What platform could fill a potential void is a question front of industry minds; obvious near-parallels include YouTube Shorts and Instagram Reels. Both features were created in TikTok's image -- but neither have enjoyed comparable prominence. "It's one thing to measure



People record themselves on a smartphone for social media in Times Square in New York City on January 17, 2025. — AFP

the user base or the weekly active users of those platforms," said Cirisano, numbers she said are on par with TikTok. But in terms of "cultural heft," she said, "they haven't really had the same impact."

Jahan Karimaghay, co-founder of marketing firm Benchmob, has urged clients to consider "changing their approach specifically to Instagram." "Instagram is a little bit more of an art gallery -- it's about showing content to your followers -- where Tiktok it's almost like you make content for people who don't follow you," he said. Sarah Flanagan, an influencer marketing expert in the music industry, echoed that view, saying that on TikTok "discovery is coming from a viral sound point of view" versus image.

"That's huge in terms of why Tiktok has worked so well for music," she said. It's one advantage YouTube -- which Karimaghay pointed out many people already use "as a jukebox" -- could have. "If people migrate to Shorts, there's a real opportunity for artists to connect even more music," Flanagan said. And Americans are already trying new alternatives, like China's popular viral video

app RedNote. It's surged to top Apple's free app downloads, though experts say that could be a short-term trend.

As earth-shaking as a TikTok ban stateside could be for music, "I think there's definitely artists who will breathe a sigh of relief for their mental state if Tiktok goes away, because of just the pressure to create content, the pressure to go viral," Cirisano said. In contrast to putting out a high-production music video, the explosion of short-form video has meant "suddenly artists were burdened with having to create their own format" rather than work with a full team, Flanagan said. "Nobody was telling them what to do and how to look cool."

But experts agree any respite could be brief: losing US Tik Tok won't spell the end of content creation beyond the music. "There's very few artists these days that can put up music and do very little," Karimaghay said. For Cirisano, fear of a TikTok ban is a stark reminder that "social is what is driving music and culture, and that trickles down to streaming -- when it used to be the opposite." — AFP

## Sports

# Irving shines as Mavericks roll Thunder, Nuggets scorch Heat

## Wolves ride Anthony Edwards' big night to big win

LOS ANGELES: Kyrie Irving scored 25 points as the Dallas Mavericks brought the high-flying Oklahoma City Thunder down to earth with a 106-98 victory over the Western Conference leaders on Friday. Oklahoma City, riding high after their rout of Eastern Conference pace-setters Cleveland on Thursday, suffered just their seventh defeat of the season in a roller-coaster duel against a fired-up Mavericks.

Irving was at the heart of the Mavs win, rattling in 17 points in a 41-point second quarter that allowed Dallas to open up a 64-43 half-time lead. The Thunder, who were missing Shai Gilgeous-Alexander with a wrist injury, came roaring back to draw level in the third quarter before edging into a single-digit lead.

But the Mavs, who are still without the injured Luka Doncic, regrouped superbly to close out the win, outscoring the Thunder 29-22 in the fourth quarter to seal victory. Dallas improved to 23-19 while Oklahoma City remain top of the West with a 34-7 record. Dallas coach Jason Kidd saluted his team's resilience in securing victory after watching a 20-point lead evaporate in the third quarter.

"We were flat in that third quarter," Kidd said. "We said on the bench we needed to stay the course, and stay together and in the fourth quarter we did. We feel like we have a talented team, and they have a talented team. So I thought tonight was a really good test for our group."

### Miami lose on Butler's return

Elsewhere Friday, Jimmy Butler returned for Miami after serving a seven-game in-house suspension but was powerless to prevent the Heat from slumping to a 133-113 loss to the Denver Nuggets. Nikola Jokic bagged his 17th triple-double of the season, finishing with 24 points, 12 rebounds and 10 assists in a comfortable victory for the 2023 NBA champions. Jamal Murray led the Denver scoring with 30

points on a night when seven Nuggets players finished in double figures. Butler, who was suspended by Miami after indicating he wished to leave the club earlier this month, finished with 18 points.

In Boston, Jayson Tatum scored 30 points as the NBA champion Celtics shrugged off their heaviest loss of the season to outclass the Orlando Magic 121-94. Boston, dominated 110-97 by lowly Toronto on the road on Wednesday, showed no signs of a hangover to complete a comfortable home victory at the TD Garden. Orlando took a short-lived lead early in the first quarter but once Tatum, Kristaps Porzingis and Jaylen Brown found their range, the result was never in doubt.

Tatum's 30-point haul came from 12-of-21 shooting with four three-pointers, six rebounds and four assists. Porzingis finished with 23 points and Brown added 20, including a perfect 9-of-9 from the free-throw line.

Boston improved to 29-12 with the victory to remain in second place in the Eastern Conference behind leaders Cleveland. Orlando's scoring was led by Cole Anthony with 23 points while Paolo Banchero continued his return from injury with 21 points.

In New York meanwhile, Anthony Edwards erupted for 36 points as the Minnesota Timberwolves romped to a 116-99 victory over the Knicks. Edwards was on fire from outside the arc, making 8-of-13 three-pointers while Naz Reid also caught the eye with 6-of-6 threes in a 23-point cameo shift off the bench.

In Milwaukee, the Bucks handed Toronto a reality check following their upset of Boston on Wednesday, with a 130-112 blowout at the Fiserv Forum. Milwaukee swept to their third-straight win thanks to 35 points from Giannis Antetokounmpo and 26 points from Damian Lillard. The Bucks improved to 23-17 with the victory and remain in the fourth spot in the Eastern Conference.



DALLAS: Cason Wallace #22 of the Oklahoma City Thunder controls the ball against Daniel Gafford #21 of the Dallas Mavericks during the third quarter at American Airlines Center on January 17, 2025 in Dallas, Texas. — AFP

In San Antonio, Santi Aldama scored 29 off the bench as the Memphis Grizzlies overwhelmed Victor Wembanyama and the Spurs 140-112. Spurs star Wembanyama produced another big defensive

performance with six blocks and a steal with 12 rebounds. But the Grizzlies' balanced offense proved too strong for the home side, with six players finishing in double figures. — AFP



Roki Sasaki

## Tsunami survivor Roki Sasaki overcame tragedy to reach MLB

TOKYO: Roki Sasaki is Major League Baseball's hottest new star but he had to struggle through adversity to get there, losing his father and grandparents in Japan's deadly 2011 tsunami.

The 23-year-old pitcher, who has agreed to join the Los Angeles Dodgers, is regarded as one of baseball's best young talents and news that he would leave Japan for MLB this winter sparked a bidding frenzy around the league.

His journey to the majors has been a tragic one, starting when his world was turned upside down 14 years ago at the age of nine. Sasaki's home town of Rikuzentakata was virtually wiped off the map when a 9.0-magnitude earthquake sent huge waves barreling towards Japan's coast.

His house was washed away and both of his paternal grandparents and his father, Kota, were killed. Sasaki and his mother and two brothers lost everything, and they were forced to live temporarily in a nursing home until they moved to a nearby city.

It was there that the family began to pick up the pieces, with Sasaki finding some peace of mind on the pitcher's mound.

"I was happiest when I was playing baseball," he said 10 years on from the disaster. "I could lose myself in the game and fight hard against the tough times. I'm glad I started playing baseball."

Sasaki was at school when the tsunami struck, and he and his classmates survived by climbing to higher ground. Around 18,500 people around Japan were left dead or missing in the disaster, which also triggered a meltdown at Fukushima nuclear plant.

"You never know when the life you take for granted can disappear, that's the scary thing," Sasaki later said. Sasaki went on to become a high school star, and was taken by the Chiba Lotte Marines as the number one pick in the 2019 Nippon Professional Baseball draft. Already on MLB clubs' radar, he made the world sit up and take notice when he pitched a perfect game at the age of 20 in April 2022. — AFP

## Hoffman, Hoey share PGA Tour lead in La Quinta

LOS ANGELES: Charley Hoffman, seeking a fifth US PGA Tour title at the age of 48, had 10 birdies in a nine-under-par 63 on Friday to share the halfway lead in the American Express tournament with Rico Hoey of the Philippines.

Hoffman finds himself in the hunt for his first victory since 2016 in the same tournament in which he bagged his first, back in 2007. The US veteran said there was little to draw on since the courses in use

## Rohit leads India as struggling Bumrah called up

NEW DELHI: Out-of-form captain Rohit Sharma will lead India in the one-day international home series against England and at next month's Champions Trophy, selectors said Saturday.

The 37-year-old Rohit and star batsman Virat Kohli, 36, have both faced questions about their futures after poor form since India won the T20 World Cup last year.

Also in the squad is fast bowler Jasprit Bumrah. Rated as one of the best bowlers of his generation, Bumrah suffered a back niggle in the final game of the five-Test series in Australia, which India lost 3-1. He is expected to be fit for India's Champions

## Noman and Sajid help Pakistan dominate Windies in spin battle

MULTAN: Spin wizards Noman Ali and Sajid Khan guided Pakistan to a strong position against the West Indies after another spin dominated second day's play in the opening Test in Multan on Saturday. The pair shared nine wickets between them to dismiss the West Indies for a paltry 137 in reply to the home team's 230 all out earlier in the day.

By the close, Pakistan stretched the 93-run lead to 202 by scoring 109-3 in their second innings, with Kamran Ghulam and Saud Shakeel batting on nine and two respectively when bad light ended play 25 minutes before time.

Left-arm spinner Jomel Warrican (2-17) dismissed Muhammad Hurraira for 29 after an opening stand of 67 and Babar Azam for a second failure, trapped leg-before for five. Skipper Shan Masood look solid for his 52, hitting two sixes and two fours, before Warrican ran him out after attempting a quick single.

The dry and grassless Multan pitch has already produced 22 wickets in six sessions even though two-and-a-half hours were lost on day one, and another 30 minutes on Saturday, because of poor visibility. Noman grabbed 5-39 for his seventh five-wicket haul in Tests, while Sajid finished with 4-65 to dismiss the West Indies after lunch in a first innings that lasted just 25.2 overs.

Noman and Sajid, who shared 39 of the 40 wickets in the last two Tests against England in Pakistan's 2-1 series win last year, were once again unplayable. Sajid opened the bowling and removed Mikyle Louis (one), Keacy Carty (0), Kraigg Brathwaite (11) and Kavem Hodge (four) in his first three overs.

Noman then further jolted the tourists with another four wickets to leave them on 66-8. The tail-enders showed more resistance, with number 10 batsman Warrican unbeaten on 31, with Gudakesh Motie adding 19 and Jayden Seales the last wicket to fall for 22.

Seales hit three sixes before holing out off spinner Abrar Ahmed. Earlier, Warrican took 3-69 as Pakistan lost their last six wickets for 43 runs after resuming at 143-4. Saud Shakeel top-scored for Pakistan with 84 off 157 deliveries, including six boundaries, while keeper Mohammad Rizwan added 71.

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Trophy opener against Bangladesh in Dubai on February 20, chief selector Ajit Agarkar said.

India have kept rookie Harshit Rana as back-up for Bumrah, who may not be ready for three ODIs against England beginning early next month. Bumrah's new-ball partner Mohammed Shami is making his comeback after a long injury layoff, along with wrist-spinner Kuldeep Yadav.

Test opener Yashasvi Jaiswal has been called up for the first time in ODIs. The first ODI against England is on February 6. Before that India face England in five T20s. The Champions Trophy takes place in Pakistan and Dubai from February 19 with India placed in Group A alongside Bangladesh, Pakistan and New Zealand.

India squad: Rohit Sharma (capt), Shubman Gill (vice-capt), Virat Kohli, Shreyas Iyer, KL Rahul, Hardik Pandya, Axar Patel, Washington Sundar, Kuldeep Yadav, Jasprit Bumrah, Mohammed Shami, Arshdeep Singh, Yashasvi Jaiswal, Rishabh Pant, Ravindra Jadeja. — AFP



MUMBAI: Indian cricket captain Rohit Sharma (R) and Ajit Agarkar current chairman of the BCCI selection committee, address a press conference in Mumbai on January 18, 2025. — AFP



MULTAN: West Indies' Jomel Warrican (L) run out Pakistan's captain Shan Masood during the second day of the first Test cricket match between Pakistan and West Indies at the Multan Cricket Stadium in Multan. — AFP

other four wickets to leave them on 66-8. The tail-enders showed more resistance, with number 10 batsman Warrican unbeaten on 31, with Gudakesh Motie adding 19 and Jayden Seales the last wicket to fall for 22.

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Shakeel added an invaluable 141 for the fifth wicket with Rizwan, lifting Pakistan from a precarious 46-4 on day one. Kevin Sinclair sparked the Pakistan batting collapse by taking Shakeel's wicket with the first ball after drinks.

He then trapped Rizwan leg-before off a missed reverse sweep, the original decision of not out overturned on review. Rizwan's 133-ball stay included nine boundaries. Sajid hit a boundary and a six in a rapid-fire 18 before he was bowled by Warrican on the stroke of lunch to end Pakistan's innings. — AFP

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Sports

# Goggia charges to Cortina downhill triumph as Lindsay Vonn flops

'There's nothing better for us Italians than winning here at Cortina'

**CORTINA D'AMPEZZO:** Sofia Goggia put on a speed ski masterclass in Saturday's World Cup downhill at Cortina d'Ampezzo, delighting fans with a typically fearless display on home snow as Lindsey Vonn had a disappointing run on one of her favourite pistes.

Italian Goggia charged down the Olimpia delle Tofane course which will host women's alpine skiing events at next year's winter Olympics, clocking a rapid time of one minute and 33.95 seconds. The 32-year-old finished 0.42sec ahead of Norwegian Kajsa Vickhoff Lie to put herself nine points behind new downhill table leader and fellow-Italian Federica Brignone, who finished 0.55sec off Goggia's blistering pace in third.

"There's nothing better for us Italians than winning here at Cortina," Goggia told RAI.

"I had my heart in my mouth a bit today. This place means so much more to me than what would otherwise be a normal World Cup race," Goggia added of her relationship with Brignone: "We're very competitive, we have a good rivalry which pushes us to always go as hard as we can... we both have that hunger to be the best."

Veteran Brignone's podium finish gave the 35-year-old a slender six-point lead over Switzerland's Camille Rast who did not compete on Saturday. "I'm really happy today, I managed to ski almost as I wanted. It was amazing conditions, really the slope was really good," said Brignone.

Goggia's victory was her second this season but her first in her favoured downhill discipline since recovering from injuries sustained during a heavy

training fall last year. The 2018 Olympic downhill champion suffered multiple fractures in her right leg during a giant slalom training session in Ponte di Legno in February.

Goggia has had a raft of injuries through her career due to her courageous style in the alpine speed events and her electric run on Saturday bodes well for Sunday's super-G which is also being held in Cortina.

**Vonn setback**

Comeback queen Vonn has posted some impressive results since coming out of retirement at 40 years old but finished way back in 20th after briefly threatening to crack the top five. Vonn, who finished fourth in the super-G in Sankt Anton last weekend and has 20 podium finishes in Cortina including 12 wins, lost pace on the final sector and dropped to 1.68sec behind Goggia.

But the American, who fell without serious injury during the first training session on Thursday, was still upbeat. "I'm trying to get the skis figured out. I'm still testing boots, you know, like there's so much going on, so I can't expect every race is going to be perfect," said Vonn.

"Today I made a mistake and unfortunately it cost me a good result, but I'm skiing well and I'm very happy about that." The 2010 Olympic downhill champion, however, said that her right knee which was partially replaced in April by a titanium prosthesis to enable her comeback, was not causing any problems. "I don't think about my knee at all. It's crazy," added Vonn. "I used to think about it every



**CORTINA D'AMPEZZO:** Italy's Sofia Goggia (L) winner and Italy's Federica Brignone, third placed, celebrate with their team on the podium of the Women's Downhill event of FIS Alpine Skiing World Cup in Cortina d'Ampezzo, Italy on January 18, 2025. — AFP

day, you know, when you wake up, when you go to bed, it's always there and I don't think about it at all." Vonn will have another chance to show her

chops when in Sunday's super-G, all preparation for next month's World Championships in Saalbach-Hinterglemm. — AFP

## Latifa crowned Sahari Equestrian champion

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait Equestrian Club rider, Latifa Al-Hajri, was crowned with the title of the Sahari Equestrian Club Championship, which was held at Sahari Resort.

In the sixth "main" run at a height of 130 cm, the rider Latifa Al-Hajri came in first place with a time of 42.10 seconds, without penalty points, followed by riders Khalid Al-Khabizi, Yaqoub Al-Nasrallah, Mohammed Al-Malifi, Mazen Bayraqdar and Faisal Al-Shatti.

Sheikh Sabah Ali Al-Sabah and rider Nasser Abdulaziz Al-Masaeed awarded the winners, and handed Latifa Al-Hajri the championship trophy.

In the fifth round at a height of 120 cm, rider Dalal Safar came in first place, followed by Nadia Al Mutawa, Latifa Al Hajri, Khalid Al Khubaizi, Omar Al Khudari and Ghazi Al Jariwi.

Khalid Juma won the first place in the 110-centimeter height, while Abdul Wahab Al Balool won the first place in the 100-centimeter height.

More than 150 male and female riders participated in the first and second halves at heights of 60 and 80 centimeters, most of whom succeeded in cross-



Sheikh Sabah Al-Sabah and Nasser Al-Masaeed crown the champions in the main event.

ing the barriers without errors. Raghad Al-Dabous headed the judges' committee, which included Nada Al-Awadi and Alaa Al-Sultan, while Abdulrahman Al-Fuzaiya designed the course, Asmaa Malallah was the referee, and Farah Al-Sarraj and Mohammed Al-Kandari were in charge of the warm-up area.

Rider Nasser Abdulaziz Al-Masaeed said that the championship is a strong competition between the

thank everyone who contributed to his wellbeing and care, past and much more recently," the statement added. "We know how much people supported and loved him and that love was always appreciated and made the difference. Thank you."

Law scored a total of 237 goals in 404 appearances during an 11-year spell at Old Trafford until 1973, which places him third behind Wayne Rooney and Charlton on United's all-time list. Manchester United said the club was mourning the loss of "the King of the Stretford End".

"He will always be celebrated as one of the club's greatest and most beloved players," United added. "The ultimate goalscorer, his flair, spirit and love for the game made him the hero of a generation."

The Scotland national team called Law "a true great", adding: "We will not see his likes again." Rooney paid tribute on X, posting: "Legend. Thoughts with all Denis' family and friends."

**'Football giant'**

Former United and England captain Bryan Robson, who worked with Law in an ambassadorial role at Old Trafford, described the Scot as a "fantastic man". "We have lost one of football's giants both as a

riders to win first places, and the championship witnessed a large number of participants in the beginner category at a height of 60 and 80 centimeters.

Al-Masaeed explained that the large number of local championships and the large number of clubs helped in the development and advancement of Kuwaiti equestrianism, which promises a brilliant future for Kuwaiti equestrianism.

player and a gentleman. It's incredibly sad," Robson wrote in a column in the Daily Mail.

"Denis was more than just a fantastic footballer, he was a fantastic man. So generous with his time and everything delivered with that great sense of humour of his." Law began his career at Huddersfield Town and also two spells with Manchester City plus one with Italian club Torino.

He was sold for a British record fee three times during his career. During his time at United, Law won the FA Cup and English top-flight twice, in 1965 and 1967. However, a cartilage injury forced him to miss the famous 4-1 victory over Benfica in the European Cup final at Wembley in 1968.

Law is the only player to have two statues dedicated to him at Old Trafford, one as part of the "United Trinity" alongside Best and Charlton. Law's other previous clubs added their tributes.

City, the current English champions, said the "whole of Manchester" was mourning. In a reply to United's X post, the club said: "The whole of Manchester, including everyone at City, is mourning with you." Huddersfield called their former player an "immortal" of football while Torino said he was an "iconic figure" in the club's history. — AFP

## Kvaratskhelia signs for Paris Saint Germain from Napoli

**PARIS:** Georgia winger Khvicha Kvaratskhelia on Friday completed a move to Paris Saint-Germain from Italian league leaders Napoli, the French champions announced. "Paris Saint-Germain is pleased to announce the signing of Khvicha Kvaratskhelia. The 23-year-old winger, who will wear number seven, becomes the first Georgian player in the club's history," said a PSG statement.

No transfer fee was revealed but media reports in France said the Parisians would pay 70 million euros (\$72m), not including potential bonuses, for the player. The move comes 24 hours after the 23-year-old posted a video on social media telling Napoli fans "it's hard for me but it's time to say goodbye".

"It's an honour to be able to wear the PSG shirt," he added in an interview with the PSG website on Friday. "It was a dream for me to play for one of the biggest teams in the world. I'm very proud, it's a dream and we're going to fight together to fulfil our dreams. I'm very happy."

The 2023 Scudetto winner, who arrived at Napoli in 2022 as a bargain buy from Dinamo Batumi in his homeland, was voted Serie A's best player that season. Kvaratskhelia scored 30 goals and provided 29 assists in 107 matches in all competitions for Napoli.

He has signed a contract until 2029 with the Ligue 1 leaders and will hope to dislodge France international Bradley Barcola from his position on the left wing in coach Luis Enrique's starting line-up.

Kvaratskhelia could make an immediate debut for his new club when they go to Lens on Saturday, looking to extend their lead at the top of Ligue 1 to 10 points from nearest challengers Marseille.

However, he will not be able to play in PSG's remaining Champions League matches this month, at home to Manchester City next Wednesday and away to VfB Stuttgart on January 29. PSG will only be able to add their new signing to their Champions League squad should they make it through to the knockout phase beginning in February.

They currently sit one place and one point outside the qualifying spots for the play-off round before hosting City in a crunch match at the Parc des Princes. "The project is what convinced me to come here," added Kvaratskhelia. "I know what the club wants to achieve and how it works with players. It's in line with who I am, a lot of great players have played here, so I didn't think much about it when I had the opportunity to come to Paris." — AFP

## Man Utd and Scotland great Denis Law dies

**LONDON:** Manchester United and Scotland great Denis Law has died at the age of 84, sparking a wave of heartfelt tributes to a man known as Old Trafford as "The King". Law was a member of United's European Cup-winning side under Matt Busby in 1968, when they became the first English club to lift the trophy, though he was injured for the final.

Capped 55 times by Scotland, he remains his country's joint all-time leading scorer with 30 goals alongside Kenny Dalglish and is the only Scottish player to win the Ballon d'Or, in 1964. Law - part of the famed "Holy Trinity" at Old Trafford alongside Bobby Charlton and George Best - was diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease and vascular dementia in 2021.

His death was confirmed on Friday "with a heavy heart" by his family, who said "he fought a tough battle but finally he is now at peace". "We would like to

# Classifieds

**Clinics & Hospitals**

**Clinics**

Kaizen center	25716707
Rawda	22517733
Adaliya	22517144
Khalidiya	24848075
Kaifan	24849807
Shamiya	24848913
Shuwaikh	24814507
Abdullah Salem	22549134

Nuzha	22526804
Industrial Shuwaikh	24814764
Qadsiya	22515088
Dasmah	22532265
Bneid Al-Gar	22531908
Shaab	22518752
Qibla	22459381
Ayoun Al-Qibla	22451082
Mirqab	22456536
Sharq	22465401
Salmiya	25746401

**Hospitals**

Sabah Hospital	24812000
Amiri Hospital	22450005
Maternity Hospital	24843100
Mubarak Al-Kabir	25312700
Chest Hospital	24849400
Farwaniya Hospital	24892010
Adan Hospital	23940620
Ibn Sina Hospital	24840300

**Change of Name**

**I, MOHAMMED JAFAR**, holder of Indian Passport No. M8395165 having permanent address "Iqbal Manzil", House No: #957, Makhdoom Colony, Bunder Road, Near Check Post, Bhatkal-581320, Karnataka, India, residing in Kuwait at present, hereby declare that henceforth my name will be read as (given name) **Mohammed Jafar** and (surname) **Sayed**. (#6621) 16/01/2025

**I, RAHUL CHOUDHARY**, holder of Indian Passport No. T1338471 having permanent address: Ward No: 2, Mandawa, Jhunjhuno, Rajasthan-333704, India, residing in Kuwait at present, hereby declare that henceforth my name will be read as (given name) **Mukesh** and (surname) **Kumar**. (#6622) 16/01/2025

**Matrimonial**

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## Nunez rides to Liverpool's rescue, Newcastle thrashed by Bournemouth

Crystal Palace are up 12th after a third win in four games



LONDON: Liverpool's Argentinian midfielder #10 Alexis Mac Allister (R) heads the ball as he fights for it against Brentford's Danish midfielder #06 Christian Norgaard (L) during the English Premier League football match between Brentford and Liverpool at the Gtech Community Stadium in London on January 18, 2025. — AFP

LONDON: Darwin Nunez struck twice in stoppage time to earn Liverpool a 2-0 win at Brentford and open up a seven-point Premier League lead on Saturday after Bournemouth ran riot in a 4-1 win at Newcastle. The Reds looked set to drop points for the third consecutive league game until the much-maligned Uruguayan doubled his tally of Premier League goals for the season in the dying seconds in west London. Nunez swept home Trent Alexander-Arnold's cross before smashing in a second for a vital twist in the title race.

Instead of cutting the gap, Arsenal are now under pressure to keep pace when they host Aston Villa in the 1730GMT kick-off. Liverpool had been wasteful in front of goal in a 1-1 draw at Nottingham Forest in midweek and Arne Slot's men

nearly let another two points slip away. Dominik Szoboszlai smashed a shot off the bar and Cody Gakpo failed to hit the target with a glorious chance to open the scoring before half-time. On a rare quiet day for Mohamed Salah, Slot was forced to turn to Nunez to make an impact off the bench and he duly delivered.

The 25-year-old had not scored in the league since November but was in the right place to finish after a neat one-two between Harvey Elliott and Alexander-Arnold. Substitute Elliott was the creator for the second, feeding Nunez to cut inside and fire past Mark Flekken.

**Kluivert bursts Newcastle bubble**  
Bournemouth snapped Newcastle's winning streak in stunning fashion as Justin

Kluivert's hat-trick fired the Cherries up to sixth. The Magpies were looking to set a club record with a 10th consecutive victory in all competitions but were thoroughly outplayed by the visitors, who are themselves now on an 11-game unbeaten streak.

Kluivert, son of former Newcastle striker Patrick Kluivert, scored a hat-trick of penalties earlier this season at Wolves. This time all three of his crisp finishes came from open play as Bournemouth were rampant at St. James' Park.

Milos Kerkez added a fourth in stoppage time as Andoni Iraola's men closed to within one point of fourth-placed Newcastle. Bournemouth have never qualified for European competition before and Kluivert said that is the goal for an ambitious squad.

"Why not dream big and let's see where we can end up," said the Dutch international. Leicester have lost seven consecutive Premier League games as a 2-0 home defeat to Fulham edged Ruud van Nistelrooy's men closer to a return to the Championship.

Emile Smith Rowe and Adama Traore were on target for the visitors, who move up to ninth. Crystal Palace are up to 12th after a third win in four games thanks to Jean-Philippe Mateta's double in a 2-0 win at 10-man West Ham.

Mateta opened the scoring early in the second half before Konstantinos Mavropanos' red card gave the Hammers a mountain to climb. The Frenchman then sealed the points from the penalty spot late on. — AFP

## Sinner surges into Melbourne last 16

MELBOURNE: Defending champion Jannik Sinner raced to victory at the Australian Open on Saturday to sweep into the last 16 as Iga Swiatek demolished Emma Raducanu. Also into the second week is 38-year-old Gael Monfils after he stunned fourth seed Taylor Fritz — with the veteran's wife Elina Svitolina also enjoying a shock win immediately after on the same court.

"It's really a great day for us today, beating top-four players and playing great tennis," said Ukraine's Svitolina. American qualifier Learner Tien, 19, won in straight sets to extend his fairytale run on his debut in Melbourne.

But Danielle Collins, the pantomime villain after thanking hecklers for "paying my bills" in the previous round, lost and was booed. Italian world number one Sinner dropped a set for the first time in 14 matches in the second round.

But there were no such wobble against the unseeded Marcos Giron on Rod Laver Arena as he sprinted home 6-3, 6-4, 6-2 in 2hr 1min, slamming 35 winners and eight aces. Awaiting him next is either Serbian Miomir Kecmanovic or Danish 13th seed Holger Rune.

"If I want to go on in this tournament I have to improve," said the 23-year-old Sinner. French showman Monfils rolled back the years to storm back and defeat the American Fritz 3-6, 7-5, 7-6 (7/1), 6-4. The unseeded Monfils, who hit a career-high ranking of six in 2016 but is now 41st, is enjoying a late-career flourish.

A week ago he became the oldest singles champion in ATP Tour history when he swept to victory at the Auckland Classic. Monfils faces another American in 21st seed Ben Shelton, who is a big fan. "I think that any time he's on the court, it's a box-office match," said Shelton.

Monfils is married to Svitolina, who emulated his giant-killing efforts when she defeated world number four Jasmine Paolini, also on Margaret Court Arena. Svitolina came through 2-6, 6-4, 6-0. "I warmed up the court for her," joked Monfils.

Tien became the youngest man to reach the fourth round since Rafael Nadal in 2005 when he overcame injured Frenchman Corentin Moutet. The gifted teenager won 7-6 (12/10), 6-3, 6-3 with Moutet collapsing clutching his leg in the third set before gamely carrying on.

"Honestly it feels pretty crazy to be in the second week," he said. Tien stunned three-time runner-up Daniil Medvedev in a five-set epic in the previous round. Home hope Alex de Minaur, the eighth seed, went through in four sets against Argentina's Francisco Cerundolo and will face American Alex Michelsen for a place in the quarter-finals.

In a one-sided battle of former US Open champions, Swiatek romped to a 6-1, 6-0 triumph in a statement victory over Raducanu as she pursues a first Melbourne crown. Emma Navarro, the eighth seed from the United States, joined the Pole in the next round with a gritty three-set win over Ons Jabeur. — AFP

## Sheikh Ali Al-Sabah Annual Shooting Championship concludes

KUWAIT: The late Sheikh Ali Al-Sabah Annual Shooting Championship for the season (2024-2025), organized by the Kuwaiti Shooting Sport Club, concluded on Saturday by crowning the winners of its competitions, which witnessed the participation of shooters from Kuwait.

Governor of Mubarak Al-Kabeer, Sheikh Sabah Bader Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah, stressed in a statement to reporters after the conclusion of the tournament the keenness to hold this tournament annually to support Kuwaiti shooters who make great achievements for Kuwaiti sports in international forums.

Sheikh Sabah Al-Bader Al-Sabah explained that the great efforts of the Kuwait Shooting Sport Club and their outstanding organization of the tournament, which was held at the Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Olympic Shooting Complex, resulted in its great success, congratulating the shooters who won the various competitions of the tournament.

For his part, KSSC President Engineer Duaij Al-Otaibi said in a statement that the tournament witnessed a large participation of Kuwaiti shooters as they competed in (pistol, rifle and archery), indicating that it appeared at a high technical level and achieved high numbers for shooters in various categories.

Al-Otaibi stressed the importance of these local tournaments in raising the level of Kuwaiti shooters as well as an opportunity to emerge new talents in the game, looking forward to the club's organization of the HH the Amir International Grand Prix Shooting Championship next April, which is the most important championships hosted by the club annually.

He appreciated the support of the late Sheikh Ali's family of Kuwait Shooting Sport, which is represented by holding this tournament annually for many years and this year witnessed the presence of Sheikh Sabah Al-Bader Al-Sabah and Sheikh Ali Thamer Ali Al-Sabah, thanking all the working committees for their tireless work, which contributed to its success.

The competitions of the championship, which was organized by the Kuwait Shooting Sport Club over three days, resulted in Hamad Al-Nimshan winning



Group photo of men winners.



Group photo of women winners. — KUNA photos

the first place in the men's 10-meter air pistol, and Abdullah Al-Harbi won the first place in the men's 10-meter air rifle.

Shooter Hassan Al-Filkawi won first place in the 25-meter pistol competition, while shooter Saud Al-Subaie won first place in the 50-meter rifle competition. Archer Habes Al-Shammari won first place in the Olympic bow and arrow competition, while archer Mohammed Madi came first in the same competition for a distance of 30 meters, while the first place in the (compound bow and arrow) competition was awarded to archer Abdullah Malallah.

In the women's competition, Ghazlan Ali won the 10-meter air pressure pistol competition, while Mariam Irzouqi won the 10-meter air pressure rifle competition. Nour Al-Sharhan won the first place in the Olympic bow and arrow competition, while Hessa Mohammed won the first place in the 30-meter competition, while Hanan Al-Mayas won the first place in the compound bow and arrow competition.

In the junior category, archer shooter Nasser Al-Rabah won the first place in the 10-meter air rifle competition, while shooter Rataj Al-Ziyadi won the title of the female category in the same competition.